

Board of Commissioners Resolution

15 West Kellogg Blvd.
Saint Paul, MN 55102
651-266-8350

Sponsor: Social Services

Meeting Date: 10/6/2020

Item Number: 2020-283

Title: Personnel Complement Increase in the Social Services Department

Background:

Minnesota Statute requires county boards to provide enough emergency services to meet the needs of adults, children, and children's families who are experiencing an emotional crisis, emotional disturbance, or mental illness. Emergency services must provide an immediate response 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week (Minnesota Statutes section 245.484 7 subdivision 1 and section 245.462). A team of 16 mental health professionals, 11 mental health practitioners, and two peer support specialists are providing Mental Health Crisis Services in Ramsey County. Because of increasing need for crisis services, four additional staff are required to provide effective and timely responses; two for Children's Crisis and two for Adult Crisis.

Extensive community outreach has increased awareness of Children's Mental Health Crisis Services leading to more demand for services from residents. During the 4th quarter of 2019 (October - December), phone calls were up 189% compared to the year before. Face-to-face assessments and outreach visits were up 144% for the same time period. Increasing staffing levels for Children's Mental Health Crisis Services is critical for the stability of children and families in Ramsey County.

Adult Mental Health Crisis needs additional staff because of a change in the way the County is providing coverage during the overnight shift, increasing demand due to recent events that have created anxiety and stress, and increased collaboration with the Emergency Communications Center.

On July 1, 2020, Ramsey County terminated its agreement with Dakota County Crisis Response to answer adult crisis phone calls during the midnight to eight a.m. shift. At times, long-term clients with severe emotional disturbances need phone contact throughout the day or night to manage their symptoms. Calling the crisis line to manage symptoms is part to their treatment plans. Generally, they do not need face-to-face visits from Crisis staff. County staff heard from some of these long-term clients that Dakota County staff would not accept frequent calls and referred these clients back to the police. Data from Dakota County for the seven weeks prior to the contract ending shows their staff answered an average of 31 calls per week during the night. Since assuming coverage for the overnight shift, Ramsey County staff have averaged 67 calls per week over nine weeks. By providing coverage for the overnight shift, Adult Mental Health Crisis will be able to help some clients maintain stability through ongoing phone contact and avoid more restrictive care.

Stress related to COVID-19, the murder of George Floyd, and community unrest have fueled increased need for crisis services among adults. COVID-19 led community mental health providers to rapidly adopt telehealth services. The level of illness experienced by residents often exceeds the capabilities of telehealth services. In addition, persons needing Mental Health Crisis Services frequently lack the technology required for telehealth. Ramsey County Mental Health Crisis staff have continued to provide in-person, mobile crisis response as well as in-person, urgent care services at its Urgent Care for Adult

Mental Health facility throughout this period of upheaval. The staff within the Ramsey County Mental Health Crisis teams have displayed unwavering courage and commitment to the needs of the Ramsey County community throughout the pandemic, even in the early days when personal protective equipment was unavailable. The ability to meet face-to-face with a crisis clinician during this time of overwhelming stress has been of great benefit to many in the Ramsey County community.

In addition to the increased usage of Mental Health Crisis Services caused by recent events and the change in overnight coverage, Adult and Children's Mental Health Crisis supervisors have been collaborating with the Emergency Communications Center (911) to route more calls related to mental health needs directly to the crisis phone lines rather than to police dispatch. Crisis supervisors have provided training to 911 staff and have made themselves available to answer questions about crisis response capabilities. This change increases the work of Mental Health Crisis staff but provides a more appropriate intervention for mental health crises.

During the first quarter of 2020 (January -March), inbound calls to Adult Mental Health Crisis averaged 584 per week. During the second quarter (April – June), Adult Crisis received an average of 774 calls per week with a high of 822 calls during the week of July 6, 2020. This represents a 33% increase. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic initially reduced face-to-face assessments, primarily for walk-ins to the Urgent Care for Adult Mental Health site at 402 University Ave East. From May to June, however, face-to-face meetings to attempt or complete an assessment increased by 59%.

Recommendation:

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners resolved to:

Approve an increase in the personnel complement of the Social Services Department by 4.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions in the Mental Health Professional and/or Mental Health Practitioner classifications: 2.0 FTEs for Adult Mental Health Crisis and 2.0 FTEs for Children's Mental Health Crisis.

A motion to approve was made by Commissioner McGuire, seconded by Commissioner Reinhardt. Ayes – 7: Frethem, MatasCastillo, McDonough, McGuire, Ortega, Reinhardt, Carter. Motion passed.

By: _____
Janet M. Guthrie, Chief Clerk – County Board