



Northwest Regional Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration

July 8th, 2026, 10:00am-12:00pm CST
753 West Boulevard, Chipley, FL. 32428
Hybrid

MEETING MINUTES

Attendance:

In Person- 24

Virtual- 65

Total= 89

Full Attendee List is Provided in Appendix A

Hosts/Facilitators: Department of Children and Families Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) – Mark Sherrod, Regional Collaboration Coordinator; April Busby, Regional Operations Supervisor; Shaleeah Marshall, Regional SAMH Director.

Presenters:

- Linda Finkelstein, Executive Director for (NAMI) National Alliance on Mental Illness
- Diane Harris, Deputy Director for Background Screening, Department of Children & Families
- Peer Support Services Workgroup Update

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mark Sherrod called to order the Quarterly Northwest Region Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration meeting at 10:04 am.

II. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Shaleeah “Shay” Garcia welcomed the attendees.

III. PRESENTATION – (NAMI) NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS

Linda Finkelstein, Executive Director for (NAMI) National Alliance on Mental Illness

Overview of Services:

- Connection, Collaboration & Community: Three Chambers that make up the heart of NAMI Emerald Coast.



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- Vision: To envision a world where all people affected by mental illness live healthy, fulfilling lives supported by a community that cares.
- Mission: To provide advocacy, education, support and public awareness so that all individuals and families affected by mental illness can build better lives.
- Programs: In Our Own Voice, Sharing Hope, FaithNet, Peer-to-Peer, Family-to-Family, NAMI SMARTS for Advocacy, Connections Support Groups, Family Support Groups, Provider Education & WRAP Training
- (WRAP) Wellness Recovery Action Plan- 5 Key Concepts: Hope, Personal Responsibility, Education, Self-Advocacy, Support.
- FaithNet: (NAMI) FaithNet is an inclusive, multi-denominational partner that partners with faith communities to reduce mental health stigma and expand supportive resources for people affected by mental health conditions.
- Bridges of Hope: To educate faith communities about mental illness so that can create stronger safety nets and welcoming communities of faith for people affected by mental illness.

Question & Answers:

- Online participant asked for more information on neurodivergent support groups. Presenter, Executive Director for (NAMI), Linda Finkelstein provided the link to the website. [NAMI Emerald Coast](#)

IV. PRESENTATION - BACKGROUND SCREENING AND EXEMPTIONS FROM DISQUALIFICATIONS

Diane Harris, Deputy Director for Background Screening, Department of Children and Families

Overview of Background Screening and Exemptions:

- Who Must Be Screened: Child Care Facilities and Daycare Homes, Religious Exempt Childcare Facilities, Foster Homes or Placement and Adoptive Homes, Mental Health Facilities, Substance Use Facilities, Facilities for the Developmentally Disabled, Summer Camps, Afterschool or Enrichment Programs, Adult Safe Houses, Domestic Violence and Homeless Shelters and Programs that contract with the Department.



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- Common Issues to Delay Screenings: Transposed Social Security Number, the screening is not initiated in the clearing house and failure to provide documentation when requested.
- Disqualification for Employment or Licensure: Arrested for an offense listed and awaiting disposition, found guilty of, regardless of adjudication, entered a plea of nolo contendere or guilty, even if adjudication is withheld, adjudicated delinquent and the record is not sealed or expunged for substance abuse and mental health programs.
- Purpose of Exemption: To allow individuals that have criminal backgrounds to work with vulnerable populations. Completing the exemption application and submitted documents is the applicant's opportunity to show the Department how they have changed.
- Common Issues with Exemptions: Difficulties obtaining documents, sending the same documents and local law enforcement checks and background screening checks expiring.
- Key Points: Provide the Department with enough information to make an informed decision, each offense must be addressed, and the exemption process is an opportunity for the applicants to tell the Department how they have changed.

Question & Answers:

Background Screening Processes:

1. **Question:** Tracie Moorer (NWF Health Network) – For the application for exemption, can volunteer time be substituted for work history?

Answer: Diane Harris (Department of Children & Families): Yes. Listing any work you have done in the community would be helpful.

2. **Question:** Melissa Warren (Florida Springs Wellness Recovery)– Is there a way to bridge the gap with two sets of letters that come during the exemption process to save time? The first letter for disqualifying offenses comes around 30 days and the letter for all other offenses comes an additional 30 days after the first.

Answer: Diane Harris (Department of Children & Families)– We are always looking for things we can do to make the process better.



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3. **Question:** Tracie Moorner (NWF Health Network)– After all docs are gathered what is the average turnaround time?

Answer: Diane Harris (Department of Children & Families)– Right now, there is no set turnaround time policy.

4. **Question:** Tracie Moorner (NWF Health Network)– If screened the first time and weren't disqualified and then rescreened and there is a new charge and they are disqualified then they must go through the exempt process, correct?

Answer: Diane Harris (Department of Children & Families)– Yes.

5. **Question:** Senie Thomas (Department of Children & Families)– If the decision is to not grant the exemption, is there an appeal process?

Answer: Diane Harris (Department of Children & Families)– If exemption is denied the person has 21 days from the day, they receive the denial email to file the appeal. Informal hearing – not contesting a disputed fact formal hearing contesting the facts and it goes to an Administrative Law Judge for a hearing. At the end of 30 days the judge will do a recommended order and then it goes back to department. The department can accept or deny the recommended order. Diane Harris provided further information by saying that if someone is seeking CRPS designation, it is important to enter the screening with a position as a peer by the employer, not as an employee. If it's not listed as peer for position, then the Background Screening Coordinators do not know the correct statute to review for disqualifying offenses. It is important to make sure information is entered accurately.

6. **Question:** Jacob Gilbertson (Banyan Center) – What about if someone changes positions? If there rescreening process?

Answer: Diane Harris (Department of Children & Families) – You can start off as eligible as a peer and if you change positions then you will need to go back and do a level 2 screening. You must stay as a peer until the level 2 screening is complete and get an eligibility determination.

7. **Question:** Shannon Massingale (NWF Health Network) – When there is a change in statute to disqualifying offenses, how are people notified about that change because of renewing?



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Answer: Diane Harris (Department of Children & Families)– We can reach out to Licensing and ask for their assistance with notifying providers of statutory changes.

- 8. Question:** James Weaver (Life Management Center)- Are DCF reports involving child abuse and neglect linked to background screenings so that the employer would know?

Answer: Diane Harris (Department of Children & Families)– We must have specific statutory authority to use child abuse or neglect checks for employment. Only during certain circumstances like a group home or childcare positions would include abuse reports. For the programs that can get abuse and neglect checks we note it in the screening if the applicant should contact the Department and request their records. The provider will have access to the Florida Public Rap Sheet if they initiate the screening in the Clearinghouse. This will show any arrests that are not sealed or expunged. The providers do not have access to national criminal history information.

- 9. Question:** Christina Bertera (NWF Health Network) - Some states categorize offenses differently.

Answer: Diane Harris (Department of Children & Families) - We here in Florida review the elements of the crime and compare them to Florida criminal offenses. If a charge is a disqualifying offense if committed in Florida, then the individual is disqualified.

V. PRESENTATION – PEER SUPPORT SERVICES WORKGROUP UPDATE

Overview Summary:

- Workgroup Goals: INCREASE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & AWARENESS, EXPAND & STRENGTHEN PEER WORKFORCE, BUILD INFRASTRUCTURE.
- Increase Community Engagement: Oxford House Documentary Premier, Revive Awareness Day Events Across the Panhandle, Recovery Revival, Identify the date, time, and location of our local delegation meetings.
- Delegation Meetings: Share lived experience, highlight local priorities and concerns, engage representatives by allowing them to ask questions and provide feedback, Help shape the agenda for session.



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- **Expand & Strengthen Peer Workforce:** Established a robust team of experienced individuals living in the Northwest Region, Utilizing a partnership with NAMI and the Northwest Florida Health Network to train and equip peers, Educate providers and community leaders on the value of peer support in the workforce, Including PEERS into the Post overdose Support Teams, Standing up the CORE program and utilizing funding for CRPS certification & employment, Inserting peers into Jails, Sherrif's Office calls, and court system, Inserting peers into Emergency Rooms.

Question & Answers:

Peer Support Services Workgroup

Comment: Shannon Massingale (NWF Health Network): Recommended that the workgroup reach out to vocational rehabilitation when seeking employability.

VI. UPDATES AND NEXT STEPS

Mark Sherrod discussed Updates and Next Steps for the Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration.

- After the April (BHIC) meeting we sent out a form for interested agencies and organizations to fill out their contact information to be shared in an interagency contact list. The form included a consent to share information. As of today, we have 43 organizations that have completed the form with over 65 contacts on the list. To have a comprehensive list of regional contacts, we added the form to the Microsoft Teams chat and sent it out again with the meeting recap. If you have not completed the form for your organization, please do so.
- Our first housing workgroup meeting will be scheduled in a few weeks, and we are looking forward to the work this group does for our region. If you are interested in forming any additional work groups, please send me your suggestions.



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VII. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mark Sherrod opened the floor for public comment.

No Public Comments.

VIII. ADJOURN

Mark Sherrod adjourned the meeting at 11:44 AM CST.

Appendix A

Name	Organization
Alison Fulford	Department of Juvenile Justice
Allison Winman	Big Bend Area Health Education Center
Angel Arroyo	MCSO
Anne Bozik	SEDNET 2B Circuit 2
April Heringer	Eglin Family Advocacy
Asta Trinh	Department of Children and Families
Autumn McAllister	Lakeview Center
Bonnie Barlow	Bridgeway Center, Inc.
Brad Hill	Department of Children and Families
Bret Phillips	Liberty County Sheriff's Office
Byron Wade	Florida Department of Children and Families
Carolynn Zonia	Walton County Prevention Coalition
Chauneva Garlington	DCF SAMH
Crystal Knight	Department of Children and Families
Drew Hild	PanCare of Florida, Inc.
Eddie Fields	Gulf County Senior Citizens Association, Inc.
Emme Ledbetter	Department of Children and Families
Gabby Aboki	Early Learning Coalition of the Big Bend Region
Hannah Abrams	Florida Department of Children and Families
Hannah Jordan	Northwest Florida Health Network
Heather Lopez	First Judicial Circuit Court Administration- State of Florida
Holly Holt	Department of Health (DOH)
Janet Garrett	Nonie's Place



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Jared Hale	Charlie Health
Jawid Sultany	Department of Children and Families
Jesse Kemper	Department of Children and Families
Joy Nazary	Oxford House
Karla Sapp	CFG Health / Leon County Detention Facility
Kimberly A Fischer	Florida Department of Health in Santa Rosa County
Kirk Hall	Florida Agency for Health Care Administration
Krissy Lamoureux	Florida State Hospital
Latina Germany-Godfrey	Florida State Hospital
Lauren M. Anzaldo	Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care System (VA)
Laurie Michelle Lamar-Acuff	EAFLA
Lindsay Kerwin	Department of Children and Families
Lizette Miller	Department of Children and Families
Mariangely Charlton	Bay District Schools
Matea Suarez	Health and Hope Clinic
Megan Bennefield	Gulf County Sheriff's Office
Megan Rhoades	Sunshine Health
Melanie Spoon	Life Management Center
Merle Burkhart	Escambia County Sheriff's Office
Nerissa Feracho	Better Living Solutions
Patrick Heidemann	Disability Rights Florida
Priscilla Smith	Health Quality Innovators
Raven Reid	Dept. of Children and Families Sexually Violent Predator Program
Richardson, Rhonda	Florida State Hospital
Samone M Franklin	Florida Department of Children and Families
Sharron Washington	NWF Health Network
Shenekee Slaughter	Department of Children and Families
Stephanie A Cash	Florida Dept of Health (Franklin/Gulf Counties)
Tayler Green HCA	HCA CAPITAL HOSPITAL
Tequilla Jones	Department of Children and Families
Tia Guidry	Lakeview of Walton County
Tony Reed	Florida State Hospital
Tonya Harrison	Department of Children and Families
Tori R. Woods	Sunshine Health
Tracy Melin	Big Bend Area Health Education Center
Tracy Shelby	Department of Juvenile Justice



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Travis Alessi	DCF Adult Protective Services
William Hardin	Department of Children and Families
In Person Attendees	
Alexis Thrasher	Department of Children and Families-SAMH
Ali Stanley	Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)
April Busby	Department of Children and Families-SAMH
Ashley Sellers	Jackson County Sheriff Office
Bridget Crawford	Walton County Sheriff Office
Christina Bertera	NWF Health Network
Diane Harris	Department of Children and Families
Jacob Gilbertson	Banyan Center
James Weaver	Life Management Center-MRT
Jennifer Crutchfield	14th Court Administration
Jessica Deneen	2nd Court Administration
Linda Finkelstein	NAMI Emerald Coast
Marcia Croom	Gulf Coast SAP
Mark Sherrod	Department of Children and Families-SAMH
Melissa Warren	Florida Springs Wellness Recovery
Rachel Halvorson	Okaloosa County Sheriff Office
Rusty Holmes	SedNet 2B/PAEC
Senie Thomas	Department of Children and Families-SAMH
Shaleeah "Shay" Garcia	Department of Children and Families-SAMH
Shannon Massingale	NWF Health Network
Traci Corbin	Department of Health (DOH)
Tracie Moorer	NWF Health Network
Tyla Helms	Life Management Center-MRT
William Vaden	Freedom Life Compass