



El Diario Sin Nombre

The Newsletter Without a Name

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STATE'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SYSTEM OF CARE BEGINS TODAY



Local BH Collaborative members preparing their Letter of Readiness in Socorro. From left are Millie Sigman, Melissa Pullin, Noe Lara, Camille Scielzi, Ann Menges and Virginia Johnson.

Everything is full steam ahead on a truly innovative undertaking placing all of the state's publicly funded behavioral health services under one umbrella. Last month, however, was a busy one for the department, 14 other state agencies, local communities and ValueOptions as several provider and consumer information meetings were held across the state and local behavioral health collaboratives finalized their *Letters of Readiness*, also due in today.

On June 7, about 15 people representing the state's Seventh Judicial District (Catron, Sierra, Socorro and Torrance counties) were gathered at the Socorro Mental Health, Inc. preparing their *Letter of Readiness* and many were wishing then that today had already come and gone. "We began working on this two months ago," said Camille Scielzi, who is the point of contact in getting the Seventh Judicial District's readiness letter together. "The state wants local input when building its behavioral health policies and that is what the *Letter of Readiness* our counties are preparing are intended to provide."

It is also looking for local collaboratives to develop strong local voices to help guide behavioral health planning and services provided in communities across the state. To help in this process, the Interagency Behavioral Health Purchasing

Collaborative provided each county a *Letter of Readiness Worksheet* to complete. The worksheet asked each prospective local collaborative 15 basic questions with several sub-questions. They ranged from how the local collaborative will function, to the group's core values, to managing conflict, and proposed plans for meeting management.

A couple of attendees in Socorro from Catron County – the largest county in the state land-wise, but the third smallest in population with less than 4,000 residents and no health and human services field offices – had hoped to remain with their long-standing four-county health and human services support group that included Grant, Hidalgo and Luna counties. "Overall, I believe we will be okay here since all of us are still part of the state's behavioral health Region V, which does include our historic partner counties," said Ann Menges, Catron County Health Council Co-Coordinator based in Reserve. Surprisingly, Catron County was able to get 31 people listed as members of the local behavioral health collaborative, including state health and human services employees working in adjacent counties.

Socorro County too seemed to have all the tools needed for a good *Letter of Readiness*. Midsize counties like Socorro County already have state agencies that provide services and many county offices are already active in their communities when it comes to combating substance and child abuse, hunger and homelessness in their community.

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SCI Enrollment Also Begins (SALUD! MCOs Will Enroll Members)

Another Medicaid program beginning today is State Coverage Insurance (SCI). "The SCI is a unique public/private partnership that will help many small employers (including non-profit agencies) get their employees the health care coverage they need," said HSD Secretary Pamela Hyde in a news release. Projected enrollment for the first year alone is 10,000 people. The SCI is a Medicaid waiver program and will be open to currently uninsured adults ages 19 to 65 with family incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty level. This program is different from any now administered by the department because employers and employees help pay the premiums along with the state and federal government.

The three MCOs chosen to administer the \$20 million (state and federal dollars) SCI program for the first year are Lovelace SCI, Molina Healthcare and Presbyterian Health Plan. They also begin administering their new Medicaid SALUD! contracts today. One of the major changes is that the MCOs will no longer be responsible for providing behavioral health services to Medicaid enrollees.

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Recent examples of outreach efforts in this county include a social services summit and a local Prevention Coordination Committee that brings providers together to get services where they are needed. "Rural areas do need more resources and travel time should be considered," said Scielzi. "We are looking at developing a website for our area to get input from more people on how behavioral health services can be better provided."

One option the Sierra County committee was considering in its *Letter of Readiness* was to identify behavioral health service needs in the area through anonymous questionnaires to the public. They would be placed in places like schools, where community events are held, and in laundromats and markets.

"Overall, preparing it hasn't been bad," said Scielzi, when asked about the challenges of preparing a *Letter of Readiness*. "I've met people that I didn't know before, and I have a better understanding of what programs are available. This is an interesting group of people who listen to what others have to say. Our best responses have been from state agencies and nonprofits; maybe that's because most consumers of behavioral health services have a different focus."

CSED's Fresh Start is What HSD is All About

The Child Support Enforcement Division's (CSED) Fresh Start Program (FSP) is gradually appealing to both custodial and non-custodial parents (NCPs) in the piloted communities of Las Vegas, Raton, Santa Rosa, Taos and Tucumcari. However, early participation in the two-month-old program has been slow even after paid radio announcements clearly promoting the program as a way for delinquent parents to clear the slate and get back into their children's lives were narrated by Lieut. Gov. Diane Denish and State Representative Hector Balderas and aired in those communities.

"At the local FSP information meetings we held for NCPs interested in the program, many of them said they believed it was a 'sting operation'," said Gail Gallegos, a Las Vegas child support caseworker tapped to manage the program. "Even if they do have an active arrest warrant [for failure to pay child support] nobody is going to be arrested for coming to one of our information meetings," she said.

So far, 36 families have asked the Region IV area office to have their child support cases reviewed. Currently, 28 cases have been closed, six have been reviewed and have received a modified payment structure, and in two cases the custodial parent did not agree to the offer made by the Fresh Start Team.

In most of the cases targeted, the children involved have long since been emancipated, and the NCP will most likely never be able to pay the total accumulated interest or arrears balances. "Some of the custodial parents waived everything owed them, others waived a portion of their total balance in an agreement for a new court order, a third of the participants settled for a lump sum payment and one parent even agreed to

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Three-County Food Stamp Outreach Program Gets Going

When the New Mexico Association of Food Banks received an \$835,000 USDA grant for food stamp outreach efforts in southern Bernalillo, Rio Arriba



and Socorro counties, plans had to be made to ensure the three-year program would actually be successful. After several months of planning, and now with the help of an advisory group, ISD Director Katie Falls and project director Dee Apache have got the program moving.

Last month, 45 volunteers received food stamp training from ISD trainers Rachel Reta and Debbie Brown. Now the volunteers have begun fanning out to several hand picked sites and, with the help of ISD mobile eligibility workers, are reaching potential clients who might not otherwise visit an ISD office to apply for benefits.

Volunteers for the food stamp outreach effort were recruited by the advocacy group, New Mexico Voices for Children. They were trained on how to complete and sign a food stamp application (yes in all three places), what to ask for as proof of income and household composition and how to complete the *What You Still Need* Form. They also received instructions for determining if the client qualifies for "expedited" food stamps, meaning they could begin receiving benefits within 48 hours. Each was also issued a handy folder made by Dee Apache, with all the tools needed to help complete a food stamp application.

Among the Bernalillo County food stamp outreach sites are the Alamosa Community Center, the Southwest Senior Center, the Cesar Chavez Community Center and Department of Health field offices located in the southern part of the city of Albuquerque. In Rio Arriba County the Española Senior Center is among the sites targeted, while in Socorro County the Socorro and Magdalena senior centers, youth development centers and community action agencies are where efforts are being focused. "The people in Magdalena are really enthusiastic about this and want to set up their own program for helping those denied benefits by immediately referring them to other resources like food pantries," said Apache.

After a volunteer interviews a potential client and helps him

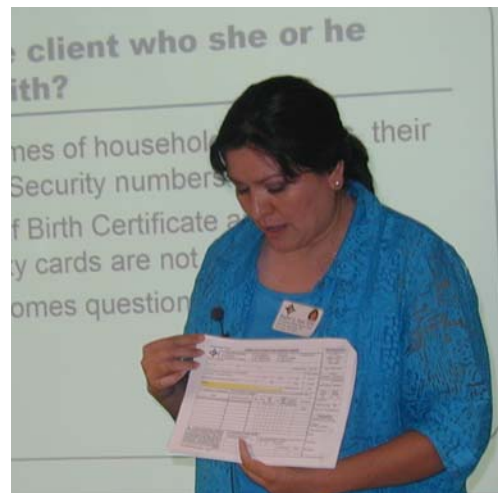
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or her complete the application, the volunteer will turn the packet in to the mobile eligibility workers (one ISD worker in each of the three counties), who will immediately process the application. "One of the big differences in this outreach effort is that the volunteer will contact each person completing an application after two weeks to find out the status of the case and help out if more information is still needed," said Apache.

Many of the volunteers at the training in Albuquerque were already knowledgeable about the Food Stamp Program's rules, as many work with clients who speak little or no English to help them through the application process. "The volunteers are pivotal to our outreach efforts, and we are depending on them to not only sell the program, but to understand the eligibility rules as well," said Apache. "Our goal is to increase by 25 percent the number of families receiving food stamps in these three counties, and I believe that this can be done given the interest we have had so far."

"I applaud both the volunteers and the ISD staff who have worked so hard to get this program up and running," said Apache. "I am excited to see how effective outreach efforts like these can be in both urban and rural settings."



ISD trainer Rachel Reta from ISD's Region V gives instruction to volunteers on how to help clients complete a food stamp application.

Larry Tapia Inspired Many in HSD

"I always got on his case about not having his jacket on when it was getting cold outside," said long-time friend and co-worker Martha Perez from the department's Office of Human Resources (OHR). "Sometimes I found that his hands were so cold he was unable to maneuver his wheelchair, so I would put my hands on his to get them warm. I think he liked this. I still can't believe he is gone, but I guess it is goodbye."

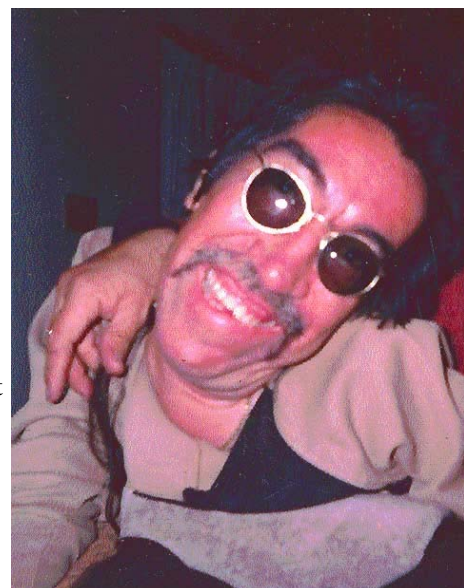
Yes, it is goodbye for Larry Tapia, who passed away peacefully on June 9. He was 48 years old and will be remembered by many in the department for either his genuine smile and warm personality, his deep laugh, his wit and intelligence, or his daring maneuvering of the hallways of Pollon Plaza in his speedy, electric wheelchair—or all of the above.

Others, too, who have seen Larry out and about on weekends have reported in as well. It seems that one of his favorite weekend places to go was where he could relax a little with a beer or two and try his luck on the ponies. Someone even said he saw Larry being ticketed at the Albuquerque Downs Race Track for speeding his way through the crowd to a betting window to place a bet just before post-time. This hasn't been proven, so it's still legend!

Larry started with the department nearly 22 years ago as a planner in the Medical Assistance Division. Being wheelchair-bound and disabled himself, his first assignment was assisting in the logistics for the 2nd Annual Home and Community-Based Waiver conference, held in Santa Fe in 1983. "Larry was in charge of registrations and transportation for conferees of this extremely well-attended, highly-rated national conference," remembers Cathi Valdes, now the Deputy Director for the Child Support Enforcement Division. "Larry stayed on after the conference to assist me in implementing the Coordinated Community In-home Care Program that offered a home-based alternative to nursing home care for persons who are elderly or disabled."

In 1989 Larry was promoted to the department's only Civil Rights Specialist position and was transferred to the Personnel Bureau. Here he did this difficult job in a professional manner, gaining the respect of both management and employees. "Larry was an inspiration to all of us, and he made a large contribution to my life with his strong spirit and wonderful attitude," said OHR's Corrine Jameson. "Working with him was a grounding experience and it always put both my own problems as well as the situations we deal with involving all of our employees into perspective."

Perhaps the normally hushed Annette Montoya of OHR says it best about Larry: "He was a wonderful person with the biggest heart. He had a disability but never complained. His strong spirit and attitude towards life was an inspiration to us all because he did have to overcome many obstacles, yet, he always persevered. He was a good friend to me, and I will miss him dearly."



HSD's Larry Tapia passed away on June 9, 2005. He was 48.

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have the NCP pay for their kid's college," said Gallegos. There are about 4,000 child support cases in the northeastern part of the state and targeted "mail-outs" are NCPs who owe the state or the custodial parent at least \$20,000.

"Most of the NCPs to whom we mailed information letters are dads; however, two are moms," said Gallegos. "Typically, they are in their 30s or 40s, have no high school education and, therefore, are not earning very much money. Some have told me they got behind because they couldn't earn enough to support themselves, much less pay child support."

"Some have even gotten themselves into a child support enforcement payment cycle where they pay money every year to get their driver's license back so they can work, only to fall behind again and have their license revoked again," said William Mee, CSED's Policy and Planning Manager.

"Employers too often look differently at NCPs who owe child support payments, which makes it even more difficult for this group of people to find work. They say, 'why should I hire him/her when they won't even support their children?'"

"What we are learning from the Fresh Start Program is that there is a great need to get more NCPs without a high school education – many with new families to support – into a job training program so they can eventually support themselves in addition to paying child support," said Mee. Others may disagree with Mee, but it is debatable whether

many NCPs without a real prospect of finding a decent job, much less long-term employment, are really "deadbeat" parents but rather just "dead broke."

When Gallegos was asked why she was picked to manage the Fresh Start Program, she said, "I was asked to help on the project when it started getting busier because I had a variety of experience in case management.

One thing Gallegos would like to see is another round of radio or newspaper announcements explaining to the public what the Fresh Start Program has done so far in this part of the state. "Maybe this way," she said, "more people will come to understand that this isn't a sting operation, and we will be able to close a lot more cases." This program is really about giving people that 'Fresh Start' in their ability to help their children, in getting on with their second families and in helping to repair their credit ratings ruined by high child support balances."

"Even though we haven't seen the results we had been hoping for, keep in mind that the program is only two months old," said Stephanie Gonzales, CSED Director. "As we begin opening up the program in other regions of the state, I believe the word will get out loud and clear that this program is for real, and we will see a commendable drop in both caseloads and complaints, allowing us to concentrate more of our resources on reaching the NCPs who can pay, but don't want to pay."



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STATE'S TASK FORCE TO END HUNGER MAKES PROGRESS



HSD Deputy Secretary Liz Stefanics and ISD Director Katie Falls at the at the Meals on Wheels kitchen in Albuquerque on June 9.



Growth in food stamp participation by over 6 percent in the last 12 month, to 93,000 cases statewide, has helped New Mexico improve its rankings among states for ending hunger and food insecurity. According to the latest survey, NM has improved from 3rd to 13th highest in the country for the number of people experiencing hunger, while it has gone from 1st to 5th in the number of people experiencing food insecurity (not knowing where their next meal may come from).