

April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024

To: River Forest Township Board of Trustees

On behalf of the River Forest Township Mental Health Committee (MHC), I am pleased to present you with our Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report of activities and services funded by River Forest Township for persons experiencing mental health issues, intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD), and substance use prevention and abuse. This includes the period April 1, 2023 through March 31, 2024.

### ***Grant Structure***

The MHC typically recommends a combination of fee-for-service and flat grants to the agencies which we fund. Fee-for-service grants reimburse agencies for specific services provided to River Forest residents. This effort ensures that River Forest tax dollars are directed most effectively to River Forest residents. Flat grants typically fund initiatives that support general outreach, education and prevention efforts that include River Forest.

FY2024 maintained the hybrid model grant offerings for programs which were re-instituted after the COVID-19 pandemic. During COVID-19 the grants were switched to flat grants.

We would like to acknowledge the incredible efforts of our agencies during the last year to be creative, engaging and supportive, and continuing to provide services to their clients in a meaningful manner.

### ***Major Collaborative Partnerships and Programs***

The Behavioral Health and Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Consortium mostly continued to meet in person and maintained the once per quarter schedule of meetings. Various topics were discussed at these meetings, including new agency programming offerings, trauma based services, and housing needs. As a part of substance use prevention efforts, Positive Youth Development held a sticker shock campaign and in conjunction with the Way Back Inn, introduced the Live4Lali “stigma busting” van to the community, an initiative specializing in harm reduction techniques. PYD is also in the process of restructuring its funding and organization due to the Federal Drug Free Communities grant ending in September of this year.

The D200 Wellness Collaboration held two Parent University events this fiscal year, one in April of 2023 and one in November of 2023. Both had about 100 people in attendance and attracted a good amount of interest across the community. Oak Park and River Forest High School continues to partner with River Forest Township, Oak Park Community Mental Health Board, Oak Park Public Library, School Districts 97 and 90, NAMI, and Thrive Counseling Center to host Parent University which focuses on quality speakers on topics regarding teen mental health.

The HUB partnership ended this year, due to agencies relying increasingly on other resources, including DHS spider, 211, 988, and Rush University’s NowPow.

We partnered with a local designer, Beth Nagy, to complete a Mental Health and (I/DD) Resource Guide, which was mailed to all River Forest residents. The resource guide is a 16 page guide to many mental

health and intellectual/developmental disability service providers in the area. The guide also contains information on local research, advocacy and support networks.

River Forest Township launched a new website; we worked with website manager Kathy Elliot to build the pages related to mental health, I/DD and substance.

A new partnership for River Forest Township formed with the community-wide PlanIt Green committee, doing work supporting green initiatives. Once a year, this initiative supports students from Oak Park River Forest High School in attending the COP conference on climate change. This initiative has also supported changes in community mental health with the addition of climate aware therapists and how making positive changes to your environment supports your mental health.

Both globally and locally mental health has become an increasingly discussed topic. We support our local area agencies as much as possible and this year that included attending the following agency events: The Community Support Services gala, the Thrive gala, the NAMI gala, the Way Back Inn gala, the Sarah's Inn gala, and the UCP/Seguin Big Event.

We have also supported mental health advocacy through the use of the following social media platforms: LinkedIN, Facebook and Instagram.

### ***Priority Areas***

- ***Suicide Prevention***

The MHC remains committed to prioritizing suicide prevention efforts by funding suicide prevention programs like QPR (question, persuade, refer), from Thrive Counseling Center, the "Ending the Silence" program from NAMI, and Support4U. Catholic Charities' LOSS program which provides support those who have lost loved ones to suicide, continues to meet in person in the River Forest Township conference room. Thrive's QPR program which expanded to all local high schools last fiscal year, is in discussion with D90 to bring the program to junior high students.

- ***Sibling Support***

The Sibshops program for siblings of those with disabilities ran throughout FY 2024. Sibshops is currently being evaluated for how to reach more River Forest families in FY 2025.

- ***Parent Support***

The MHC continued to support funding FRED a website and online meeting parent support group for Oak Park and River Forest families who have children and adult children with mental illness. A support group was also started through D90 for parents of children who have IEP's (individual education plans); we attended two meetings as guest speakers and provided resource lists to parents. We also supported a community talk through Thrive Counseling Center on executive functioning.

- ***Older Adults***

Older adults have unique mental health needs, as they experience many life changes which come with aging: loss of family and friends, job retirement, relocation or change in home, physical health changes or decline. A Program to Encourage Active Rewarding Lives (PEARLS), a

mental health program that meets seniors in their home was officially started for both Oak Park and River Forest Townships this fiscal year. At Dominican University we hosted sociologist and gerontologist Julie Bach who spoke on reminiscing.

- ***Substance Use Recovery***

The Way Back Inn began a new initiative utilizing a program called Health Rhythms, mindfulness-based drumming program, and this program is becoming more widely used through the community. Positive Youth Development was separated out from Opioid Task Force and Opioid Task Force was revived. Health Rhythms is a class that has been brought to Way Back Inn by local teacher Susan Schwarting.

- ***Disability Support Services***

Community outreach was continued and focus was placed on increasing advocacy for those working with disabilities. Each year, more services are needed for those with disabilities, however there has been a recent move to cut hours funded to direct service professionals (DSP's). Our local agencies and committee members have been striving to halt this change and make sure services stay funded and provided. Health Rhythms has also been brought to local I/DD agencies again by Susan Schwarting.

### ***The Mental Health Committee (MHC)***

Mental Health Committee members hold vast experience and education related to mental health and/or disabilities. Volunteer members include mental health activists, social workers, a psychiatrist, an attorney, a college professor, a public policy and advocacy specialist and those with lived experience and affected family members. All are passionately committed to the mental health/disabilities field.

The MHC takes great pride in the accomplishments and quality of services provided to the residents of the community. This year representatives from RiverEdge Hospital, OPALGA+, UCP/Seguin, and a fellow committee member presented to the committee. The MHC looks forward to another year of success and remains committed to providing leadership and assistance with the provision of high-quality services for the citizens of River Forest. We are grateful for their time and contributions.

This year, the committee met in a hybrid model. All meetings were held in person, although zoom was offered as an option for those who could not attend due to work responsibilities or illness. Two new members joined the MHC this year, and a waiting list was created. The waiting list currently has three people.

Sarah Schwarting also attended a Townships of Illinois seminar on Trauma Informed Townships and attended classes to keep up her state license for clinical social work. Many of these topics were also discussed with the committee.

### ***MHC Funding Priorities***

The priorities of the Mental Health Committee are driven by the current needs of the mental health and I/DD consumers living in our geographical area and the ability of agencies to provide these services. The MHC does not duplicate funding already provided by state and federal agencies to those with developmental disabilities and mental health needs. However, provision is made to these populations

for community education and family support. The current priority services for which the committee contracts are:

- Outpatient therapy – individual, group and family
- Family support
- Adolescent case management
- Prevention, outreach and education programs
- Adult care management services
- Community emergency psychiatric services
- Education and programming for drop-in center
- Sibshop programing
- Mental health screenings for children
- Development disabilities programming – early intervention, respite, in-home services, case management and day programming
- Substance use recovery support
- Advocacy
- Suicide prevention

### ***Overview of Accomplishments and Initiatives***

The River Forest Township Mental Health Committee, through local property tax revenue levied by the Township, was able to support over **18,000** hours of services in FY 2024 to River Forest residents. This included

16,000 + hours in supportive services

1,200 + hours in treatment services

50 hours in prevention/education services

Services were contracted with 12 agencies and supported 20 programs

9 Programs in supportive services

8 Programs in treatment services

3 Programs in prevention/education services

These services and programs constitute the core of mental health and I/DD services available and accessible to River Forest Township residents. In FY 2024 services were purchased with **\$183,500** in funding. Through the prudent allocation of public funds, the Mental Health Committee supports services that are accessible and affordable.

Sincerely,

Sarah Schwarting, LCSW, MSW; RMPT