



GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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April 1, 2024

As Sheriff of Grand Traverse County, I fully support the request for more inpatient psychiatric beds in Northern Michigan. Statewide, but especially in Northern MI, there is a critical shortage of behavioral health workforce as well. We need your help!

The following data collected in our jail indicates a direct correlation between a lack of mental health treatment facilities to include inpatient beds, and the health of our population. In 2023, jail data indicates an average daily population of 140 inmates. Of these persons that are incarcerated, 45% are on psychotropic medication. This equates to roughly half of our population or 63 individuals. If you want to know what's going on in your community, look at your jail population.

Persons suffering from mental illness often find themselves unable to get the inpatient treatment they need, mainly due to a lack of psychiatric beds, and eventually find themselves left untreated and ending up committing criminal violations resulting in incarceration.

We face the same issue with juveniles suffering from mental illness. Due to a lack of inpatient treatment facilities, their health issues go untreated, and they end up in the court system often being housed hundreds of miles from their family support network. Again, due to a lack of juvenile detention/treatment centers.

We are currently working on an AOT/court-ordered treatment program through our family court but this is in its infancy stage. The idea would be to properly track and ensure mental health care is being provided to our most vulnerable and severely mentally ill people. Court orders for both in- and out-patient care are necessary to help individuals who do not understand they are ill and need care, to get care regardless. The problem again is, no beds are available close to home.

Thank you in advance for your time and attention to this incredibly serious situation, and feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Michael D. Shea, Sheriff
Grand Traverse County



Sears family story on mental health in Northern Michigan:

From Dave & Jen Sears, Traverse City, Michigan

Date: 4/1/2024

My wife and I have a heart of compassion and have always had a desire to help others. Years ago I had the privilege of helping my aunt and uncle in a ministry that they had in Venezuela. One day, my uncle told me and my best friend to get in the truck that he wanted to take us on a trip. Little did we know that he would take us to an orphanage in Venezuela right on the Columbian border. I was forever impacted by that experience. I knew that what I experienced there was not ok and it completely broke my heart in my early 20's. I knew as a human being, and even more so as a Christian that I needed to be part of the solution to what I experience that day in that orphanage.

Fast forward almost 15 years later and my wife and I decided that we wanted to adopt a child. As we took classes on adoption and foster care, we were soon heartbroken by the greater despair that siblings faced in state custody, and how often many of them get separated. We had two biological kids and quickly changed our adoption paperwork to adopt two kids. Our case worker, replied and said, would you consider more kids if they were a sibling group. Long story short, we wound up looking at larger sibling groups and wound up adopting a sibling group of 4 black children. So as Caucasian parents, we had a lot of learning ahead and even were questioned by some why we would adopt kids of a different race. Needless to say, we don't see color and brought them into our home with love and support.

The adoption happened quickly and we went from a family of 4 to a family of 8 within days. New cars, new beds, new car seats, clothes for 4 new kids, backpacks for school, it was a lot to handle. Fortunately we had a community of support and friends that helped us in ways we will forever be grateful for! That being said, very quickly we realized how abused our kids had been and for 9 years now, we have walked with our kids helping them with every resource possible to live a healthy normal life. 2 of our adopted kids are living a pretty normal life and 2 of them have strong to serious challenges as a direct result of their childhood trauma. It always fascinates us to know that all 4 kids went through the same horrible abuse, yet two of them are impacted very differently.

Our oldest son will be 18 next month. These last two years with him have been a living hell. He is one that has been in therapy the majority of the time that he has been with us. We bounced from therapist to therapist seeking help for him, with little real help. We finally found a

therapist last year that helped us tremendously. She and her husband were also adoptive parents and had numerous college degrees in psychology and therapy. After a few sessions with him, they quickly identified that he has a disorder called BDP, Borderline Personality Disorder. As we continued to get him help, we were advised to go to a neuroscientist in Indianapolis that does brain mapping. They said that while this option was available in Michigan, that this particular doctor was amazing and had helped so many of their clients. So we drove down for the testing that affirmed much of what our therapists had seen with their diagnosis.

Over the months to come, his behavior continued to worsen. Threats of suicide and ultimately threats to kill us caused us to seek urgent mental health support in Traverse City. One night, we wound up taking him to Munson ER for a mental health evaluation as he was out of his mind and we could not get him calmed down like we normally could. I knew several other adoptive families that had also had to seek similar support and all of them reported negative help or no help at all from Munson. I had no other options, so we went to seek help. Unfortunately, our story was no different. After waiting for hours in a mental health secure room, the “therapist” finally came in. She asked to speak with my son alone so I went out and sat in a nearby waiting room. Approximately 45 minutes later, she came in to speak with me. She began to berate me as a dad and told me how horrible I was as his father. I was absolutely taken off guard and shocked with her accusations. She told me that there is absolutely no way that he has BPD and as she was describing BPD to me, it was clear that she had absolutely no clue of BPD or its symptoms. She affirmed him in his thoughts, he calmed down and we were discharged. I was in shock. Needless to say, within days, we had another major flair up and he wrote a letter that gave a plan with how he planned to kill us. We knew that we had to take immediate action. So I called the Northern Lakes Community Mental Health Center and in tears begged them for help. Fortunately, God put an angel on the call with me that day and she was a HUGE help to us. She said that she did not think she could help us, but she would try. She said that it is very difficult to find a bed at Pine Rest in Grand Rapids, but that was really our only option. She called down there and to her surprise, she was able to get us a bed and get him approved for admittance that day! She said, “you are obviously a Believer and have angels watching over you, because this NEVER happens!” So literally two hours later I picked him up and told him that we had a therapist appointment in GR that evening. He had no idea that we was being admitted to the hospital, he would have never gotten in the car.

So immediately after getting him admitted into Pine Rest, I began working to see what options were available for him long-term as I knew that he could not come back home. I called EVERYONE I knew....therapists, pastors, local commissioners, state congressman....NOTHING! No one had any options for him, except for him to go to a halfway house in Lansing. ARE YOU KIDDING ME? There was nothing for him, ANYWHERE in the entire state for him to get help for a mental health issue that was NOT HIS FAULT! He was severely abused and yet, the system was

about to fail him yet again. Pine Rest was able to help him for a week and then they had to discharge him. Literally in the last hours before I had to go pick him up from Pine Rest, I found an out of state family member that would take him. To say that I am disappointed, frustrated and discouraged by the lack of support ANYWHERE in our state, let alone in Northern Michigan would be an understatement. This young man would have wound up being on the streets caught up in the same system that was supposed to protect and support him. THEN WHAT? He gets involved in a life of drugs, crime and who knows what else. How much does that cost our state and society. I think back to the Fram Oil Commercial from years ago that said "pay a little bit more up front, or a lot later when your engine fails". I ask the same thing to our state, why are we not willing to make mental health a priority NOW instead of paying the heavy penalties to our society later! It costs much less to get them help when they need it instead of paying for it the rest of their lives in a state prison or worse! We know so many families that have been or are STILL dealing with this right now. We know that our youngest adopted child who has not hit puberty yet, will statically need help in the near future. We need to wake up! Too many lives are at stake. Not just the lives of those who have mental illness, but often times, unfortunately lives are taken from those who don't even know these individuals and they wind up on the evening news. Please, I beg of you to take immediate action to help create REAL solutions and help families get the help that they need BEFORE it comes to a crisis! I know numerous families that were considering adoption and foster care, to only say no because they saw what happened to families like ours, who said yes. Enough is enough, our kids matter, our families matter, stop the chaos and lets fix this TODAY!

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