



**Behavioral Health Services Advisory Council  
Project Review Committee**

**October 16, 2023**

**Held at OASAS locations in Albany, NYC, and Syracuse**

**BHSAC Minutes**

**Project Review Committee Members Attending:**

Hilda Rosario Escher: Chair

Michael Orth: Vice Chair

Deb Pantin

Kerry Megley

David Woodlock

Donna Mae DePola

Robert Russell

Ian Shaffer-virtual

Glenn Liebman (BHSAC Chair, non-voting member)

**Received Notification Not Able to Attend:**

Laura Kelemen

Sabina Lim

Kathy Gardini

**Meeting notes:**

BHSAC Chair Liebman welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the members for their attendance and agency staff for their efforts to coordinate the meeting. The Committee conducted business and voted on behalf of the Full Council in accordance with the by-laws. The Chair then turned the meeting over to Project Committee Chair Escher to present the agency projects. Chair Escher emphasized the importance of attendance to the members noting projects need to be voted on in order to have programs available to those who need services.

**OASAS Projects:**

**2023.004 – Wellness In Inwood LLC:** Submitted a Certification Application requesting OASAS approval to become a New OASAS Provider of Part 822 Outpatient services to be located at 148 Post Avenue, New York, NY. They plan is to focus on providing culturally sensitive programming for the Hispanic population with the majority of individuals specifically targeted to members of an insular community, distrust, and unfamiliarity with people from outside their own community, deep concern with assimilation, and the challenge of transmission of values to a new generation of youth. Wellness In Inwood LLC, is a Limited Liability Company established in 2022, and has one owner/member: Elizabeth Urena. Elizabeth has experience in providing addiction treatment services. Need for these services was supported in the 2023 County Plan, and the Local Community Board, as well as the NYC LGU and OASAS Regional Office. The applicant submitted financial documentation demonstrating available sufficient funding to support the initial six months of operations. The program's policies and procedures have been accepted by OASAS.

OASAS recommends approval with the following contingencies: verification of hiring of staff, final inspection of the physical plant and a copy of the filing receipt from the NYS Dept of State

indicating that the articles of organization have been amended to include the OASAS operating language. The Project Review Committee unanimously recommended approval.

**2023.005 Bronx Counseling, LLC:** Submitted a Certification Application requesting OASAS approval to become a New OASAS Provider of Part 822 Outpatient and Outpatient Rehabilitation Services to be located at 593 East Tremont Avenue, Bronx, NY 10457. Services will include medication assisted treatment, Dialectical and Behavioral Therapy, Motivational Enhancement Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and crisis counseling. All programming will be evidence-based, utilizing a person-centered approach. The program proposes to provide services six (6) days per week to include weekend and evening hours. Bronx Counseling Centers, LLC was established as a Domestic Limited Liability Corporation in April of 2021 and has three owner/members: Dr. Nidhi Sahgal, Dr. Imelda Tavas, and Hans Desnoyers who holds a Masters degree in Social Work and has experience providing addiction treatment services. Need for these services was challenged by the Community Board 6 as they indicated the area is over-saturated with other SUD treatment facilities, however, according to the OASAS mapping, there is one Outpatient program in the immediate vicinity. Need for these services was supported by the NYC LGU and OASAS Regional Office. The applicant submitted financial documentation demonstrating available sufficient funding to support the initial six months of operations. The program's policies and procedures have been accepted by OASAS. OASAS recommends approval with the following contingencies: verification of hiring of staff, final inspection of the physical plant and a copy of the filing receipt from the NYS Dept of State indicating that the articles of organization have been amended to include the OASAS operating language. The Project Review Committee unanimously recommended approval.

**CA 2023.015 -St. John's Community Services - New York:** Submitted a Certification Application requesting OASAS approval to become a New OASAS Provider of Part 820 Residential Services with the element of Reintegration only. This will be a 14-bed residential program in a congregate setting to be located at 402 South Albany Street in Ithaca, NY. Through linkage and case management services agreements, they will house individuals needing support to stay sober in Ithaca and Tompkins County. The proposed facility will serve clientele from Tompkins County; however, referrals will be accepted throughout New York State. The residence will be staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. St. John's Community Service's (New York) became established as a not-for-profit corporation in 2019 and have been providing shelter services in Tompkins County for the past 4 and 1/2 years. The Board of Directors consists of nine members, with one, member having experience providing addiction treatment services. Need for services is in line with the 2023 Tompkins County Mental Health Services County Plan, and is supported by community members as well as The Tompkins County LGU, and OASAS Central Regional Office. The applicant was found to be fiscally viable to operate the proposed service. The program's policies and procedures have been accepted by OASAS and the physical plant has been reviewed and found to be in compliance with regulations. OASAS recommends approval with the following contingencies: verification of hiring of staff, and a copy of the filing receipt from the NYS Dept of State indicating that the articles of organization have been amended to include the OASAS operating language. The Project Review Committee unanimously recommended approval.

**2023.014 Release Recovery Centers, LLC:** Submitted a Certification Application requesting York OASAS approval to become a new OASAS Provider of Part 822 Outpatient Services and Outpatient Rehabilitation Services, to be located at 3020 Westchester Avenue, Purchase, New York. Services will include individual counseling, psycho-educational group counseling, Medication assisted therapies, and 12-Step Facilitation. Initially, Release plans to serve adult clients who are either covered by commercial insurance or are self-paying for services and at

the suggestion of County officials, they are considering the addition of services for adolescents in the future. The initial proposed hours of operation are Monday through Friday 9:00 am – 5:00 pm, with the intention of extending hours to 8pm Monday through Friday, at a later date. Need for services is supported by community members and representatives from Westchester County. Release Recovery Centers established as a Domestic Limited Liability Corporation in December of 2021. This entity consists of four owner/members: Matthew Rinklin, Zachary (Zac) Clark , Zachary Snitzer and Samuel Bierman who has experience providing addiction treatment services. The applicant submitted financial documentation demonstrating available sufficient funding to support the initial six months of operations. The program's policies and procedures have been accepted by OASAS and the physical plant has been reviewed and found to be in compliance with regulations. OASAS recommends approval with the following contingencies: verification of hiring of staff, and a copy of the filing receipt from the NYS Dept of State indicating that the articles of organization have been amended to include the OASAS operating language. The Project Review Committee recommended approval with one abstention.

**CA: 2023.028- LITC BH LLC:** LITC BH LLC submitted a certification application requesting OASAS approval to become a New OASAS Provider of Part 822 outpatient and outpatient rehabilitation services to be located at 100 West Nicholai Street, Hicksville, NY. LITC would provide the same services currently operated by The Long Island Treatment Center. Program hours will remain the same: Monday (1 pm-9 pm), Tuesday (8 am-9 pm), Wednesday (1 pm-9 pm), and Thursday – Sunday (8 am-4 pm). LITC BH LLC was established as a Domestic Limited Liability Company on August 25, 2022, with three owner/members: Vicki Drazin who has a social work background, Daniel Schaffer, a Licensed Nursing Home Administrator , and Executive Vice President of Ventura Services LLC, a financial services company based out of New Jersey. Esther Kahan , a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and CASAC, is currently the Clinical Manager at the Derech Shalom Center, in Suffern, NY. Esther has demonstrated to have the substance use disorder experience as required by OASAS. Need is supported by Community services providers as well as the Nassau County Office of Mental Health and the OASAS Long Island Regional Office. The applicant submitted financial documentation demonstrating available sufficient funding to support the initial six months of operations. Staff currently employed by Long Island Treatment Center will remain in place. OASAS recommends approval with the following contingency: copy of the filing receipt from the NYS Dept of State indicating that the articles of organization have been amended to include the OASAS operating language. The Project Review Committee unanimously recommended approval.

## **OMH Projects:**

**MH-D-2863: FIRST MEDCARE, INC.:** First Medicare is requesting approval for a new MHOTRS program to serve children (ages 5 and up), adolescents, and adults in Kings County. First Medicare is an Article 28 Diagnostic and Treatment Center (D&TC), serving the Canarsie section and the neighboring communities of Brooklyn for 22 years. First Medicare projects that 80% of the annual admissions to the MHOTRS program will come from the D&TC. The program aims to improve timely access to MHOTRS services in the proposed area where the current wait time for an intake is between 1 week and several months. The program plans to hire and train staff to provide Medication Assisted Treatment and to serve the mental health needs of individuals with a co-occurring developmental disability. Reviewers are recommending approval with the following conditions: provide staff qualifications to treat individuals with a co-occurring developmental disability, clarify the clinical supervisor's availability to provide supervision,

provide the most recent certification documentation for Wellspring Early Intervention Service, and complete a preoccupancy visit with the NYC Field Office.

Questions and Comments from BHSAC PRC Members:

1. What is the plan to hire bilingual staff?
  - a. Agency indicated that they plan to hire bilingual staff. They cited their history of hiring bilingual staff at their existing D&TC center.
2. When will the program use telephone translation services especially with a population in which mental health carries a heavy stigma
  - a. Agency indicated that telephone translation services will be used primarily as a backup service if a person seeking services comes in with a dialect or language on site that staff are unfamiliar with.
3. What will be the training for cultural competence?
  - a. Agency indicated that the agency's administration does cultural competency training. The agency also mentioned a relationship with Long Island University, in which they may consider bringing on student interns from the University to assist with translating and cultural competency.
4. What are the residential violations in reference to?
  - a. Two of the agency's owners own buildings in New York City, and over a period of five years, they have received five violations. Two of the violations have been dismissed, the other three have entered into agreements to settle and close the cases. There are no outstanding violations.
5. Follow up to Question 4: Will those two owners continue to be a part of this group?
  - a. The agency indicated that they would remain owners but would have no clinical responsibilities.
6. What will the youth programming and staff look like?
  - a. The agency referenced their experience working with children and plan to recruit clinicians that have a history of competency in working with children. They intend to run a training center for evidence-based practices regarding youth programming and include families in treatment planning.
7. When working with youth it is important to have peer support for youth and families in navigating the system, especially the Developmental Disability and Juvenile Justice systems. What will peer support specialists' role be in this program?
  - a. The agency indicated that their budget supports bringing in peer support specialists, however this is just a starting point, and that they would add more, if needed. They recognized the benefits of peer support in navigating treatment.

The Project Review Committee unanimously recommended approval.

**CPAR # 65: WESTCHESTER COUNTY HEALTHCARE CORPORATION:** Westchester County Healthcare Corporation is requesting approval for capital project renovations to increase the capacity of the Mid-Hudson Valley Division of Westchester Medical Center (WMC Mid-Hudson) from 40 to 60 beds. The proposed 20 bed increase at WMC Mid-Hudson completes the relocation of 20 beds at the HealthAlliance's Mary's Ave. Campus (HealthAlliance). The resulting capacity of 20 beds at HealthAlliance and 60 beds at WMC Mid-Hudson ensures these providers will continue to operate an overall capacity of 80 inpatient psychiatric beds. Increasing WMC Mid-Hudson's inpatient beds by 20 will allow WCHCC to develop a Center of Excellence (COE) for both psychiatric and chemical dependency services, creating higher quality care within the region and improve operational and financial performance of the agency. The COE benefits include the development of specialized behavioral health programs such as dual diagnosis inpatient care, Chronic Psychotic Disorder, Early Psychosis, as well as Mood and

Anxiety Disorder, creation of modernized patient care spaces to improve patient outcomes and experiences, consolidation of scarce resources and management to gain operational efficiencies and a greater chance to attract needed physicians and staff to a more comprehensive program. The anticipated project completion date is December 2025. It is noted, WMC Mid-Hudson has been operating and staffing a temporary 15-bed psychiatric unit since May of 2020. These 15 beds are part of the 20 beds that will be permanently increased. Reviewers are recommending approval with the following conditions: submit a Certificate of Occupancy and the Architect's Letter of Substantial Completion, and a successful pre-occupancy site visit with the Hudson River Field Office upon completion of renovations.

Comments from BHSAC PRC Members:

1. In this geographic area, it may be more beneficial to invest in community-based and crisis services instead of inpatient.
2. It is refreshing to see increasing beds.

The Project Review Committee unanimously recommended approval.

**MH-D-2888: SARAH'S HAVEN INC.:** Sara's Haven is requesting approval for a new MHOTRS program to serve adults in Queens County. The proposed program intends to improve access to mental health care and specialize in serving veterans. Existing MHOTRS programs in the target service area are reportedly experiencing a waitlist up to eight months. Also, per the Department of Veteran's Affairs, Queens has the fourth largest veteran population in NYS, and had a suicide rate of 6.3% in 2016-2018. The members of the governing body of Sara's Haven includes an army veteran who founded the agency V.E.T.S., Inc., a Queens non-profit that operated a 10 bed residential facility for displaced veterans. After the first few years of operation, the program plans to provide targeted services to Holocaust Survivors. Reviewers are recommending approval with the following conditions: provide additional information on Utilization Review and offsite services policies, submit a plan for ADA accessible accommodations for service located on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the building, confirm policies on informing individuals of alternatives to telehealth when requested or indicated, and complete a pre-occupancy visit with the NYC Field Office.

Questions and Comments from BHSAC PRC Members:

1. What is the plan to hire bilingual staff?
  - a. Agency indicated intent to hire bilingual staff.
2. What is the plan for cultural competence training for staff?
  - a. Agency indicated that training will occur to ensure staff have cultural competence for treatment of people in the program including veterans.
3. Should co-occurring treatment be embedded into the model because of the population being served?
  - a. Agency indicated that they intend to provide co-occurring disorder treatment and that they are aware of the prevalence of co-occurring disorders within the veteran population.
4. Why are the FTEs so small for a Medical Director (0.2 FTEs) and Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner (0.7 FTEs)?
  - a. Agency indicated that this is just an estimate, and they will try to hire a higher percentage of psychiatric staff, but that recruitment for these positions has been difficult everywhere.
5. PRC recommended that to mitigate this hiring issue, the agency could possibly have a prescriber on call when there is not one immediately available. for the remainder of the time.

The Project Review Committee unanimously recommended approval.

**MH-D-2889 MOUNT SUPPORT LLC:** Mount Support is requesting approval for a new MHOTRS program to serve children and adolescents in Kings County. Mount Support was formed to assist community members with finding services for their children with emotional disturbances. As members of the community themselves, they can understand concerns about the culture, religious beliefs, and stigma for those seeking treatment. Through these outreach and engagement services they determined that providing licensed MHOTRS services would help to enrich the services they currently provide. The primary service areas will include Williamsburg, home to one of the largest Hasidic Jewish communities outside of Israel. Locating providers that understand the community's culture and religious beliefs is an important factor when families decide to seek treatment for children and adolescents. Through community outreach efforts and work with the NYC Department of Education, Mount Support has identified approximately three hundred seventy-five (375) children and adolescents in need of culturally competent mental health services. They also received approximately eight hundred (800) inquiries from the community seeking referrals and other assistance in navigating the mental health system. A subset of approximately five hundred (500) of these inquiries were for assistance regarding children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances. Reviewers are recommending approval with the following conditions: complete a preoccupancy visit with the NYC Field Office and designate staff to complete OMH required pre-employment clearances.

Questions and Comments from BHSAC PRC Members:

1. How many kids will receive services, and what will the involvement of families look like?
  - a. Agency indicated that one of the key components of clinical treatment will be working with families. The community that they will be serving has a lot of large families and they will include family therapy.

The Project Review Committee unanimously recommended approval.

**CPAR #137 NEW YORK FLUSHING HOSPITAL AND MEDICAL CENTER:** FHMC is requesting approval to construct a 30 bed inpatient psychiatric unit on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the main building. The construction will involve expansion of the current 18 bed psychiatric inpatient unit by 12 beds, conversion of 2 med/surge beds, 4 pediatric beds, and 6 transitional care beds, and the relocation of an existing Med/Surge bed to another floor, as well as cosmetic upgrades. The construction cost is \$13.879 million and will be covered entirely by DOH's Health Care Facility Transformation Program Grant. The new inpatient unit at FHMC will help improve access to inpatient level of service. Due to the pandemic, some segments of the populations are struggling more with mental health and substance use issues including communities of color, lower income communities, and individuals with pre-existing mental illness. FMCH's primary service area has an above average mental health and depression rating with a lower-than-average satisfaction in response by community providers. FHMC also reports that the annual discharges for patients experiencing an acute mental health crisis are 821, patient days are 9,855 with an average length of stay at 12 days. Currently there are over nine (9) psychiatric facilities patients may be transferred to, and often beds are not available. The 18 bed unit is currently offline, and therefore the construction will result in no impact on program operation. The project's anticipated completion date is January 2025. Reviewers are recommending approval with the following conditions: submit the architect's attestation of substantial completion, complete a preoccupancy visit with the NYC Field Office, revise policy and

procedure to reflect the program as a 9.39 receiving hospital, and indicate the credential and job description for the Peer Specialist position.

Questions and Comments from BHSAC PRC Members:

1. What were the thoughts behind eliminating 18 voluntary beds to develop a 30-bed involuntary unit?
  - a. OMH responded that involuntary units can still receive people on a voluntary basis, so the transition expands the population that can receive services at this program.

The Project Review Committee unanimously recommended approval.

**Closing:**

BHSAC Chair Liebman thanked everyone for a productive meeting and noted the next meeting will be on December 6, 2023 at OMH locations.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:30 a.m.