

ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE TEAM (ART)

A collaboration between Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center and the City of Winona

November 20, 2020

History

The City of Winona has considered for years a program to use social workers or other trained mental health professionals to complement or support police response: to respond to crisis calls where callers request mental-health support, and/or uniformed law enforcement may not be necessary; to provide proactive response and follow up support to individuals who often use emergency services for mental-health crises; and to lower call volume so law enforcement has more capacity for other services.

Background

The City of Winona City Manager proposed including \$300,000 in the 2021 tax levy to add staff that would provide social services to the Winona community. The Winona City Council approved the initial proposal on a vote of 4-3 in August. In September, the proposal was amended to \$225,000 and approved by the City Council on a vote of 5-2.

Beginning in October, a coalition of Winona community members, stakeholders, and city staff formed the Alternative Response Group. The group collaborated across several gatherings in October and November to research and design a model and envision how to add these positions to best serve the Winona community. The group was composed of 12 participants providing broad representation across the community, including nonprofits, social services, local government, racial justice and social activism, and others; they also worked to get feedback from their community networks throughout the process.

The group came to consensus around a model (*see Appendix I*), and then began exploratory conversations with community partners around the best fit. The group has reached initial consensus on a proposal to contract with Hiawatha Valley, given that all core elements of its vision are achievable through a proposed contract, and will be asked to provide final feedback in late November.

Needs and outcomes

This program seeks to meet two critical and connected city needs: providing an alternative to existing police department response by sending highly trained mental-health professionals to increase residents' access to mental health services and social services; and in providing that response and follow up care, freeing up significant time, resources and funding for the department.

As just one example, the Winona Police Department has used more than 120 staff hours this year responding to one individual with severe mental-health issues. Providing an alternative response will both give this individual and many others stronger and more comprehensive care in order to reduce

their needs for future response, as well as create significant savings and free up critical hours for patrol, community policing, investigations, and other core department work.

RECOMMENDED WINONA MODEL

Contract

The City of Winona intends to enter a contractual agreement to partner with Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center to employ the additional positions. The contract the City would propose would be for five years, running through 2026. The contract would detail and outline the following aspects listed below. The contract would have an opt-out clause by either party effective with a minimum of six months notice to the other party.

Goals

The ART is designed to be an accessible resource with goals such as:

- Provide an alternate first response to police in appropriate cases
- Provide resource connections and case management
- Assist and support the police department with crisis intervention, follow-up with individuals and families after incidents involving police
- Collaborate with existing community crisis and follow up resources and services, including: Hiawatha Valley's Mobile Crisis Team; the Advocacy Center of Winona's advocate program; the Winona Community HUB supported by Winona Health; and others.
- Create a trusted, confidential, community-based resource available to all city residents with minimum interaction from the government
- Act proactively to provide resources that will change the trajectory of a person headed towards or experiencing a crisis so that they avoid the long-term effects of it, and are supported in seeking followup resources in order to reduce future crisis needs

Emergency Response

The ART will have the capability to provide an alternative response to non-violent 911 calls with existing caseload, mental health crisis assistance, as well as assist with crisis intervention planning both in person and remotely. The ART will be dispatched through the county dispatch center and tasked with providing emergency-level response time. The ART will provide confidential services, support and follow up.

Referrals

The primary day-to-day focus of the ART, outside of emergency response, would be connecting with and providing care to city residents referred by the police department, as well as other city departments such as the library, Senior Friendship Center, and others. Communication with the police department will be consistent, seamless and ongoing.

Personnel and skill sets

It is expected that Hiawatha Valley will employ two Community Connectors and operate the ART in a similar manner as their Crisis Response Team. The team members will be trained and certified in areas such as crisis intervention, de-escalation, case management and in other specialty skills as needs become apparent. The Community Connectors prioritize referrals, resource connections, and followups, and track and support the individuals as they seek and access resources. The Community Connectors, as they have capacity, will accompany individuals as they connect to services and ensure follow-through. They will tap into the emerging infrastructure of Community Connectors and the Community HUB in Winona to ensure maximum resource availability to clients.

Earned income

In some cases, the services offered by the Community Connectors will be reimbursed by insurance. When this occurs, the City of Winona will have its cost for services reduced. This will be spelled out in greater detail under the contract between both entities.

Hours, Location, Communication

The Alternative Response Group envisioned the staff would work during the hours most mental health 911 calls occur. Most likely the ART will operate out of the HV office building on Sarnia Street in Winona. Communications with Winona County dispatch will be maintained by radio. Communications with and service requests from the Winona Police Department will be seamless and ongoing. Interagency communication between all resource providers and networks in Winona likewise will be seamless to the benefit of the people being served.

Equipment

- Office Space (desk, phone, computer etc.)
- Vehicle used for transportation to provide crisis assistance or response, followup, resource connection, and appropriate resource connection transportation.
- Radio: capable of communicating with County dispatch and Winona PD.
- Computer/cell phone
- Tablet and or cell phone with internet connection may be necessary for the additional staff when out in the field for resource connection and data-base access
- Other

Management/supervision

The ART will be supervised by managers from Hiawatha Valley. The intention is for the team to operate independently while also being closely connected to a larger organizational team (Mobile Crisis Team, etc.) for the purposes of communication, connections, and professional development.

Ensuring efficient and effective communication and cooperation between the positions and the existing City and County staff is a crucial aspect of the program's success. Winona police leadership (either Chief or Deputy Chief) and the City Manager will have the ability to weigh in on team member job performance. Issues with the contract will be under the purview of the City Manager and HV Executive Director.

Next Steps

The most critical next step is support from the Winona City Council to include this program in the 2021 budget. With approval, the city will then work with Hiawatha Valley through the winter and possibly into early spring to finalize the details of the contract. Once the city has clarity on 2021 funding due to current uncertainties around Local Government Aid and COVID-related budget disruptions, and if city leadership supports moving ahead at that point, the program will launch in spring 2021.

Synergies and Collaborations

Success of this program relies on the ability to direct people in need to the resources they require, and by reducing the need for Winona Police to answer calls, often repeat calls for service that are outside of their ability to provide effective long term service. Winona Police will see a reduction in call levels and will be able to better direct their resources into community policing and proactive crime reduction. In addition, there are many excellent organizations in Winona that already provide resources to those in need, ART will not duplicate these services but will seek to enhance them.

Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center is in the midst of a mission expansion beyond providing mental health services. They are working on programs and services that assist individuals and families with social factors that impact health as well as physical health and mental health treatment behaviors/adherence. They are in the process of contracting with Winona County to provide Community Connectors at the jail in order to reduce recidivism of inmates.

Finally, it is clear that the Mission, Vision and Values of Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center complement the goals and vision for the ART (*see Appendix II*).

APPENDIX I: Alternative Response Group - model vision

ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE GROUP MODEL VISION

VISION

- Call comes in through traditional dispatch
- The alternative response addition is a pillar like police, fire, ambulance - dispatched as needed
- Team is separate from the police department, housed somewhere independently (library, fire department, others)
- City could hire team members or contract with county, Hiawatha Valley, other organizations
- Responders are competent in broad crisis intervention and followup - some specific skills and training depending on needs and trends
- Responders work during highest call time hours - 3-11pm, 3pm-1am, 6pm-6am
- Responders provide followup services and referrals, connecting folks to resources
- No silos - seamless communication
- Maintain high level of confidentiality - no information used against people in the future
- Responders ideally have some access to county records
- Community education and awareness campaign built in
- Dispatch training built in
- Strong evaluation and tracking right from the start - allows program to adapt, collects strong data to make case for future support
- Mutually supportive connections with existing resources (Hiawatha Valley mobile crisis, Advocacy Center advocates, Winona Community HUB)

FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

- Adding a community connector to expand the reach of the Winona Community HUB, in order to add capacity as well as the potential for earned income
- Strengthening mutually supportive (including financial) connections with existing community resources, such as the Advocacy Center of Winona's advocate program
- Consider growing the program into hybrid governance and support models, including considering a nonprofit designation
- Focus on ongoing training, specialties, specific professional qualifications depending on needs and trends

APPENDIX II: Hiawatha Valley Mission, Vision, Values

Mission

The community leader in delivering exceptional, responsive and consumer focused behavioral health services.

Vision

To provide exceptional mental and behavioral support and services to enhance the well-being of our communities through a non-profit structure.

We will achieve our vision by:

- Providing quality, innovative services that are accessible
- Partnering and collaborating with other agencies to increase the health of our communities
- Cultivating ways to fund services and staff resources
- Advancing the continuing education of our staff members by seeking out the best and most current knowledge and training on behavioral health treatment and services

Values

In all that we do we are committed to:

- Integrity-We do what we say, and we own what we do. We do the right thing even in the face of adversity.
- Respect-We are all valued for our unique abilities, qualities and achievements, and all of our roles are important for our communities and organizations success.
- People Focused-We look at everyone as individuals and work with them to find the best person-centered approach to meet their needs.
- Community Focused-We care about those in our communities, we value community ideas and we work to build a stronger community for all.
- Continuous Improvement-Small, incremental changes for the better. We are innovative in our approach to continuously improve our organization and the care we provide to those in the communities we serve.
- Compassion-We invest time into people and set them on a path for success.
- Partnerships & Collaboration-We collaborate with community organizations that are invested in our mission to ease the financial burden and better serve those in need.
- Empowerment-We provide support for clients to be successful and engaged in their community. We create a work place where members share responsibility for supporting our mission.
- Financial Stewardship-We monitor our finite resources so we can provide for those in need.