



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 28, 2015

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State grant promotes behavioral health services in Gallia, Meigs jails

ABH/Jail Transfer Pilot Project will bring entities together to evaluate and treat offenders

GALLIPOLIS, Ohio – A grant of \$125,000 from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) will help the Gallia-Jackson-Meigs Board of Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services coordinate behavioral health services for inmates at jails in Gallia and Meigs counties, promoting community safety and opportunities for offenders. State and local officials gathered today at the Gallia County Courthouse to announce the partnership.

Connecting people with appropriate medications and treatment through local behavioral health care provider Woodland Centers, Inc. (WCI), as early as possible during their incarceration will reduce admissions to the state-run regional psychiatric hospital in Athens, Appalachian Behavioral Healthcare (ABH). Evaluating and treating inmates at the jail location will save money and time, as well as risk, over transporting them between the jail and the hospital. It will also reduce recidivism by addressing the mental issues that may be a component of their criminal behavior.

“We know that a high percentage of people in jails and prisons have mental health or addiction disorders. Making connections to treatment while they are incarcerated can reduce escalation of their conditions and give them the opportunity to improve their lives,” said OhioMHAS Director Tracy J. Plouck. “There is a need in several areas of the state to improve collaboration among local jails, hospitals and treatment providers to address strains to the communities that these offenders pose. We welcome the ABH/Jail Transfer demonstration project proposed in Gallia and Meigs counties as an opportunity to support innovation with local partners.”

Ronald A. Adkins, executive director of the Gallia-Jackson-Meigs Board of Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services, said the board is pleased to help facilitate this relationship among WCI, ABH and law enforcement. “When an individual is incarcerated and loses access to health benefit coverage, our best response up to this point has traditionally been crisis/emergency services only. This has created stress for the local sheriffs and their jail staff and an increase in placements at ABH,” Adkins explained. “This grant allows our system to better serve these individuals while in the jails with a broader array of services to help address their immediate behavioral health care needs in a more timely and efficient manner. Ongoing care while incarcerated, and planned benefits management and aftercare when released from jail, are proactive efforts to better serve this population,” he said.

WCI will be providing services to residents at the Gallia County Jail, Gallia County Work Release Center, Meigs County Jail and the Middleport Jail. In addition to services while incarcerated, WCI will deliver aftercare and benefits coordination to individuals when they are released from jail.

WCI Director of Operation Kevan Mock is also looking forward to implementing the ABH/Jail Transfer project. “For a long time, there has been a gap in funding for people in jail. This project will give Woodland Centers, Inc., the opportunity to provide services to those who would otherwise not receive them. It will allow us to help reduce the number of jail transfers to ABH, but also deliver services that have a positive impact in the communities we serve.”