

January 20, 2010

Dear Steering Committee members,

As a member of the Sacramento County MHSA Steering Committee and, most importantly a parent of a special needs child, I am encouraged by the increased awareness by the mental health community that interventions are needed for children K – 12. I am proud that the State of California is tackling the important issues of universal mental health care. One of the key components, “Prevention and Early Intervention”, focuses on identifying the special needs of children and providing early interventions toward wellness. Many advocacy groups and public agencies have represented children and their families in this process. Unfortunately most parents do not know advocacy groups exist or have any idea how to access services that exist to help their family. I see the word “stakeholder” in many meeting agendas, minutes, and bulletins, but I believe parents and their children have the most at stake – we are the primary stakeholders. Schools are usually where the early signs of mental and behavior disabilities can be addressed. Some children have emotional, physical, and learning disorders that are glaring, i.e. autism. Other learning issues are not noticeable, i.e. visual and auditory processing problems. Some disorders masquerade in other ways or are co-morbid, such as ADHD, which is a typical example of a label that is so universal that it fails to address some severe forms that affect learning. These kids often cannot learn in traditional settings. Schools should inform all parents of their rights, but the information is usually presented as boilerplate on the back of a form or pamphlet. With limited funding, school districts are understandably reluctant to dedicate funds for special education unless the child is severely disabled. However, every child has the right to a free and appropriate public education. Many parents do not have the time do research solutions as they struggle day-to-day with their family challenges. Sacramento County Parent Partners, Youth Partners and Family Advocates are experienced in the struggles facing families and I believe should be included in every aspect and every program of MHSA if we are truly to become a client and family driven system. I ask that you support advocacy efforts by including a Family Partner/Advocate and Peer Partner/Advocate staff position in every funded program.

Sincerely,

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