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New grant to mobilize peers in mental health and substance use treatment

Lynchburg, VA – Mental health and substance use disorders and access to services are identified as a top community need in Central Virginia (CHNA, 2021). Yet, individuals identify fear and shame as a barrier to seeking treatment for a mental illness. They report feeling concerned regarding the possible negative consequences of seeking help, including feeling judged by others (Crumb et al., 2019).

With support from an AmeriCorps Planning Grant in the amount of \$173,547, Horizon Behavioral Health will devote personnel support to marshal a response to these critical barriers to treatment affecting the communities of Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Campbell and Lynchburg City.

Utilizing a Peer Recovery Model, the vision for the grant is to mobilize 10 full-time AmeriCorps volunteers and/or Peer Recovery Specialists as a highly effective means to address the community need for mental health and substance use intervention. A Peer Recovery Specialist (PRS) is an individual with lived substance use or mental health experience who serves as a model and guide for others diagnosed with a substance use disorder. The grant will support integration of Peer Recovery Specialists within the following Horizon treatment programs: Crisis Receiving Center, Adolescent/Young Adult Substance Use and Mental Health (TREE) Services, and Adult Psychiatric Services.

In the grant proposal, Bedford Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court Presiding Judge R. Louis Harrison underscores the need for a community response, *“Cases of serious mental illness and/or deep-rooted substance abuse make up a large percentage of our cases. Except for those few who meet the requirements for our family drug court, we have no intensive coordinated response. Our treatment regimen is often jail. There is a huge need for a better response. I am therefore overwhelmingly supportive of this grant. It would be a great thing for our community if we could develop a response system that effectively addressed the problems instead of removing these wounded individuals from society.”*

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Horizon Behavioral Health has been the primary public behavioral healthcare provider in the Central Virginia region for more than 55 years. Horizon provides services to adults and children, addressing challenges with mental health, substance use and intellectual disabilities. Horizon is accredited by CARF International. This represents the highest level of accreditation that can be given to a behavioral health organization.