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Information for Consideration by the McLean County Behavioral Health Coordinating Council July 13, 2016

INtegrity Counseling is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit delivering donation-based counseling from our location at 502 S Morris using the volunteer professional services of eight counselors. Integrity was founded in 2014 inspired by the continuing news coverage of how the McLean County jail was being used to provide mental health services in part due to a lack of readily available services. Our goal has been to remove the financial and time barriers for access to care for as many persons as we can.

As long time residents in the community engaged in supporting agencies that serve the poor and homeless and active in our church's efforts to serve, we also understood that to be successful we would need to connect to the network of agencies and organizations that could help support our clients. Behavioral health issues are often stabilized and improved by addressing issues with substance abuse, physical health, housing, and life skills. Addressing these factors also reduces repeat offenses that take persons back through the criminal justice system and can sometimes even prevent a first offense.

The Closing the Gap Project (<http://closingthegaproject.org/>) is a grass roots organization formed out of the experiences of Tosha Maaks with the criminal justice system as a person with mental illness. The goal is to increase public awareness of both today's challenges and the County's mental health action plan to address them while giving voice to those with mental illness and their families and support organizations. The first public forum was held in February 2016 and the second is scheduled for July 16th.

Our experience with Closing the Gap connected us with persons involved with NAMI and several other support organizations, persons with experience with mental illness and criminal justice, and their family members.

We are thankful to be living in a county that is committed to improving our behavioral health systems and that has such a wealth of dedicated professionals, public officials, members of law enforcement, and concerned and engaged members of the public. We do see many opportunities to improve collaboration, education and awareness, and enhance the involvement of the public, interest groups, and communities of faith in supporting the efforts in McLean County.

We have much to learn, but we have a few ideas to offer in addition to our support.

Points for Consideration:

- Coordination across agencies is a huge part of the solution. In times with limited resources, avoiding duplication of effort is paramount. Increased knowledge for the public and for the agencies and service providers of each other's activity would greatly help.
- Budget limitations point toward the value of public/private collaboration and partnerships. It will take all of us.
- Consider NAMI as a partner in education and organization and as a representative and advocate for citizens with mental illness. Programs such as "Ending the Silence" could assist in educating the public. <http://namilivingstonmclean.org/>
- Our work with our clients, with Closing the Gap, and in our discussions with other providers has shown that access to psychiatric care and those able to prescribe is a significant limitation today. We need a breakthrough in this area.
 - Examine psychiatrist retention successes stories in other communities
 - Consider innovations such as expanded telepsychiatry and physician education
 - Consider the impact of improved legislation for Advanced Practice Nursing
- Efforts that enable prevention and diversion have the highest benefit to both individuals and tax payers.
- Housing remains a priority with a focus on improving landlord participation in scattered site transitional and longer term housing and potential innovations (such as tiny houses) that may require zoning accommodation to be implemented.
- Significant systemic change could take years. We will need to prioritize.

As INtegrity Counseling, we will continue to provide services to our clients and work with the county, our partner service organizations, and efforts like Closing the Gap to identify priorities to advance and find low hanging fruit to make a difference one person at a time.

Respectfully,

Luella and Don Mahannah
Co-Founders of INtegrity Counseling, Inc.