

maladjusted: Recommendations

Mary Tulip, Kaillie Wald

Theatre for Living

March 24, 2015

maladjusted: Recommendations

The following recommendations were drawn from the *maladjusted* performance held on March 7, 2015, in Medicine Hat Alberta. Included are general recommendations for policy change. Information gathered originates from suggestions and concerns expressed by community members during the play and throughout the evening. Second year students from the Medicine Hat College Social Work Program created and distributed surveys to audience members asking for further recommendations. Additional suggestions were gathered in this method.

It was apparent that community members in attendance recognize problems within the mental health system. Most were able to pinpoint the cause of the issue, but coming up with solutions was not as easily done. This suggests there is room for further dialogue within the community. Interestingly, those who stepped onstage expressed a desire to build a trusting and empathic relationship with the clients/ actors. This indicates people in the community believe that connecting with the client is key.

1. Community members expressed concern that not everyone can make it in to see mental health professionals during regular office hours, such as oil field workers, single parents, or students. They also expressed frustration with wait times for accessing mental health services. The following recommendations for change in mental health services, policies, and procedures were made, recognizing the importance of timing in seeking supports, and the importance of a working relationship.

-Flexible hours of service, including evenings and weekends.

-Increase availability of in-person professional services and crisis supports.

- Provision of timely or immediate access to professional mental health services (decrease wait time to mitigate risk).

2. Community members expressed frustration over being “shuffled” through the system. To alleviate these feelings and improve service users’ experiences, the following recommendations were made by those in attendance.

- Better integration of service
- Better communication between mental health service providers
- Establish a community hub or support network office within Medicine Hat to help people better navigate the system.

3. Community members value our youth, and suggested they would like those struggling with mental illness/addiction to be well supported within the school system. To increase protective factors for youth, those in attendance suggested the following:

- Create peer support programs within the school system
- Provide regular training and workshops for those involved in peer support programs.

4. Community members in attendance suggested taking a proactive approach to addressing stigma. Not all understand the complexity of mental illness or addiction, and many believe people dealing with these concerns can simply make the choice to change. Suggestions made with regard to increasing public understanding and decreasing stigma include:

- More time and energy spent on educating the public about mental illness and addictions.
- Examine the language used when talking about mental illness and addiction.
- Continue to provide opportunities for public to increase awareness about mental illness and addictions.

5. Community members are concerned that the professionals working in mental health are becoming focused on diagnosing and medicating clients. Those in attendance conveyed a preference for focusing on the client's potential to recover. As such, the following recommendations we made regarding ways to support clients' experiences.

- Consider taking a recovery model approach, wherein all can and do recover from mental health concerns.

- Define treatment and recovery in partnership with the client.

- Explore alternatives to medication.

- Consider eliminating a required diagnosis to access mental health services.

6. Community members expressed concern for mental health workers who carry heavy caseloads, worrying that workers' level of competence will be affected, and that workers might experience burnout. The following recommendations are being presented to managers and supervisors within the field mental health services, as suggested by those in attendance.

- Assign reasonable caseloads to workers and hire more staff.

- Consider wiser spending within mental health agencies to provide more funding for additional staff members.

- Consider ways of involving those seeking to enter a similar line of work. For example, involving students provides an opportunity for them to increase professional competence, and may help alleviate some of the workload.

7. Community members recognize the importance of involving those with a certain level of professional power, such as doctors, to create change within the mental health care system.

Those in attendance suggest the following recommendations concerning this awareness.

- Persons in positions of authority should advocate on behalf of their clients.

-Professionals should feel safe in raising concerns; supported and not penalized for seeking change.

Throughout the evening of the performance, it was overwhelmingly identified that government and organizational policies, and funding requirements present a massive roadblock to providing and obtaining effective service delivery. This requires stakeholders to take the time to consider recommendations put forth by concerned citizens, and even lobbying for change. Many interviewed believe effective change begins at the top and trickles down. It can be argued that every single one of the other recommendations may be vastly improved by policy reform; indeed, the same body of governance interconnects them all.