



State funding small, rural initiatives

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By DIANA DEL MAURO | The New Mexican
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With a desire to help the community he moved into, David Owens started New Choices five years ago in Las Vegas, N.M. But he readily admits the nonprofit group hasn't accomplished as much as he hoped because it lacked money.

During the summers, New Choices runs a popular golf program in San Miguel County for at-risk youth and college students. And New Choices also covers the cost of treatment for some poor people with substance-abuse problems in San Miguel County.

Now, with first-time funding from ValueOptions, New Choices has established an intensive outpatient treatment program in the town of Santa Rosa, which is located in Guadalupe County. Since it opened Oct. 1, the program has seen about 20 clients — some who are courtordered and others who seek the help voluntarily. Trained professionals run individual, group and family counseling sessions. The program is held three times a week, for three hours per session. It lasts 14 weeks.

“Alcohol and drugs in this state — particularly in rural communities — is everywhere,” Owens said. “A lot of people say that when the sun goes down, the community character changes.”

Funding small, rural-based initiatives is part of a new direction mapped out for New Mexico's behavioral-health system.

One could argue: Nothing will improve in the quality of care for people with mental illness and substance-abuse problems unless the network of providers is beefed up, both in quality and in number. To achieve that involves moving away from stuff that doesn't work and investing in the stuff that does.

So when the state drew up a contract with ValueOptions, a for-profit company hired to manage all public spending for mental-health and substanceabuse services in the state, it required that ValueOptions spread the cash around a little differently.

That explains why a wideranging list of providers in 33 counties just received \$4.5 million from ValueOptions. The money was taken out of the company's administrative budget for the purpose of “community reinvestment.”

The goal, says ValueOptions New Mexico head Pamela Galbraith, is to build new programs and enhance the better programs in the state.

The New Mexico Behavioral Health Collaborative, an oversight group that represents numerous state agencies, set the priorities — basic services, services for American Indians, services in rural areas and programs run by people with mental illness or substanceabuse problems. Then providers around the state were invited to apply for the money.

This month, ValueOptions gave an accounting of where the money went. Proposals came from service providers and consumers of behavioralhealth services alike. Some money went to providers that the state had not contracted with before, while other dollars went to longtime contractors.

Of the \$4.5 million, nearly half went to tribal communities and to programs directed toward American Indians.

The Santa Fe Mountain Center, for instance, received \$47,494 to help Santo Domingo Pueblo develop a therapeutic adventure program for families. The program involves a ropes course as well as education for families on historical trauma and decolonization — what Santa Fe Mountain Center director Sky Gray calls, “significant issues that have greatly impacted the Native American communities for generations.”

Communities in Northeast New Mexico (Region 2) received a total of \$653,494 for 11 programs.

Here are the details:

- ◆ The Life Link in Santa Fe received \$72,000 to provide services for the homeless.
- ◆ The Mental Health Association of New Mexico received \$14,000 to keep a toll-free help line going in Las Vegas, N.M.
- ◆ Dr. Bob Franklin, a psychiatrist in Taos, received \$30,000 to provide consulting services to primary care doctors in rural areas.
- ◆ Sangre de Cristo received \$60,000 to provide the telehealth equipment and technical support for primary care doctors in rural communities to access psychiatric services via technology.
- ◆ The New Mexico Corrections Department received \$20,000 to provide outpatient treatment services to jailmates.
- ◆ Helping Hands Inc. received \$30,000 to provide substance-abuse health education to women in their late teens and early 20s in Mora County.
- ◆ Santa Fe Mountain Center received \$47,494 to develop a therapeutic program at Santo Domingo Pueblo.
- ◆ Tewa Women United received \$50,000 to provide services for victims of sexual assault.
- ◆ Eight Northern Pueblos received \$170,000 to provide substance-abuse services to American Indian adolescents in Española and Northern New Mexico.
- ◆ Las Cumbres Community Services received \$100,000 for its early childhood mentalhealth training initiative.
- ◆ New Choices, a nonprofit, received \$60,000 to provide intensive outpatient services to people with substance-abuse problems in Santa Rosa.

“With the reinvestment funding, we’re able to help providers and consumers build sustainable programs that address behavioral-health concerns within their own communities and maintain those enhanced services that added demonstrated value to New Mexico’s behavioral health system,” Galbraith said in a written statement.

For information about the intensive outpatient treatment program in Santa Rosa, call 505-472-0902.

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