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STATE LEADERS TO 'WEAVE VISION' FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Leaders from the state's top social service agencies will join forces Oct. 9-10 as a first step in developing a plan to provide more effective, easily accessible community-based services for children with serious emotional disturbances.

Agency leaders will host a panel discussion, "Weaving a Tapestry of Collaboration," from 10:45-11:30 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 9, at the Oklahoma Children's Behavioral Health Summit, hosted by the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS).

The first-of-its-kind summit, with a theme of "Weaving a Tapestry of Hope," will be held at the University of Central Oklahoma's Nigh University Center in Edmond.

Panel participants include Dr. Terry Cline, ODMHSAS commissioner; Howard Hendrick, director of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services; Richard DeLaughter, executive director of the Office of Juvenile Affairs; Dr. Leslie Beitsch, commissioner of the Oklahoma Department of Health; Janice Hendryx, director of the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth; and Mike Fogarty, chief executive officer of the Oklahoma Health Care Authority.

"Children's behavioral health services have been on the decline in Oklahoma for about the past 15 years," said Donna Sledge, communications and technical assistance coordinator for the Oklahoma Systems of Care Initiative, a program operated by ODMHSAS. "This summit represents the first time the leaders of the state's major child-serving agencies have united

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for this purpose. Through collaboration, they will develop and implement a plan to increase the quality and number of behavioral health services for Oklahoma children.”

An estimated one in 10 American children has a serious emotional disturbance. In Oklahoma, more than 60,000 children fall into this category, Sledge said.

“However, fewer than 3 percent currently can be served by the state mental health system,” she added. “Funding for treatment services is wholly insufficient to address this treatment gap in any meaningful way, and state funding for prevention and early intervention services has been virtually nonexistent.”

The summit will build upon an interagency partnership formed in 1999 to cut through the proverbial government “red tape” and focus directly on the needs of children and their families, Sledge said. As a result of this partnership, ODMHSAS received a six-year, \$9.4 million federal grant last October to launch a statewide “Systems of Care” program. This program takes input from the child and family, and agency partners, to develop a custom-made plan to meet the child’s physical, emotional, social, educational and family needs.

“Systems of care programs have yielded impressive outcomes in terms of a child’s performance in school settings and in reducing the need for out-of-home placements, including both decreased institutionalization and involvement in the criminal justice system,” said Sledge. “We know that early and effective intervention is the key. Systems of care, however, is just one approach to providing additional children’s services. We need input from those in charge of Medicaid, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and other social service programs to complete the circle of hope for these children.”

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In addition to the panel discussion, other events on Oct. 9 include the welcome at 8:30 a.m., given by Rand Baker, ODMHSAS deputy commissioner for mental health programs, and summit facilitator Bruce Strahl, and opening remarks, provided by Cline, from 9-9:15 a.m. A program on the "System of Care Philosophy" will be held from 9:30-10:30 a.m., followed by the panel discussion from 10:45-11:30 a.m. Throughout the afternoon, a number of presentations will be given.

On Friday, Oct. 10, Palma Bucher, a representative of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, will moderate a family panel on "Partnering with Families" from 8:30-9:30 a.m. Throughout the day, guest speakers will talk on subjects ranging from juvenile services to clinical best practices.

In addition to ODMHSAS, other partner agencies for the summit are the Department of Human Services, Office of Juvenile Affairs, Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth, Oklahoma Health Care Authority, Parents as Partners, Oklahoma State Department of Health, University of Oklahoma Child Study Center, Oklahoma State Department of Education, and Department of Rehabilitative Services.

For more information about the summit, contact Sledge at (405) 522-4156.

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MEDIA AVAILABILITY: Agency leaders will be available for interview after the panel discussion. We will have break-out rooms available from 11:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m.