



**For Immediate Release**

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**McKenna's Mental Health Task Force Evolves into Working Group to Address Needs**

On May 9, the Texas Ski Ranch will host "Wake Up and Shred the Silence," a teen suicide prevention campaign, during its 2015 Cablestock competition, which draws thousands of young adults and youth to the area.

Though the play on words references a popular wakeboarding term, "Shred the Silence" is exactly what the Mental and Behavioral Task Force is working toward when it comes to the stigma of mental health and substance abuse. The Task Force concluded its research and development phase and convened its ongoing working group on April 9. The Task Force is made up of provider agencies, law enforcement and community officials, as well as special groups such as Texas State University whose representatives and students are organizing the Shred the Silence campaign alongside River City Advocacy, a local nonprofit mental health provider.

The McKenna Foundation established the Mental and Behavioral Health Task Force in October 2014 to address community mental health concerns and gaps in the mental health and substance abuse services continuum. In addition to identifying a high need for crisis services, the Task Force identified a need for community and parent education; high demand for school-based services; a shortage of qualified psychiatrists; inpatient and outpatient services gaps; lack of transportation; and lack of services for integrated treatment programs for dual diagnosis.

Alice Jewell, director of the McKenna Foundation, stressed that the working group would be aggressively working toward closing these gaps.

"This is high priority. One of our first tasks will be to establish a Community Education Campaign to reduce the stigma of mental health and substance abuse treatment," Jewell said. "We are also looking to the community to contact us with their concerns and questions. We are looking for feedback from organizations and people who are interested in helping with community solutions."

Already, the group is acting quickly to expand crisis response and accessibility to services. At the top of the Task Force's priority list is the establishment of a Mobile Crisis Outreach Team (MCOT). This evidence-based practice is a collaboration between local law enforcement, local hospitals and mental health providers that can

offer a 24-hour a day mobile crisis team which will be able to provide on-site assessment and follow-up to care and services.

Law enforcement officials stated that they sometimes received as many as seven calls per day related to mental and behavioral health and often wait up to eight hours at local hospitals for patients to be assessed and transported to care facilities.

“This really confirms what we already know – that we have a shortage of mental health care professionals and a shortage of facilities. It is an epidemic,” said Capt. Michael Peshorn, New Braunfels Police Department.

Creating a mobile crisis team, as well as establishing telemedicine, would also address getting help to those in rural areas, said Randy Consford, director of Hill Country Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Center – Comal County Mental Health Center.

Target populations include children and youth; seniors; those suffering from substance abuse/abuse/misuse; and collaborations with law enforcement.

The McKenna Foundation provides services to enhance the health and wellbeing of the New Braunfels community and serves as a partner and resource to others who share that goal, now and for future generations.

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