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Joint Committee Work Session Takes Place to Hear Challenges And Successes of Farmington-area Substance Abuse Program



Associates working with Totah Behavioral Health Authority in Farmington, N.M., show members of the Health, Education and Human Services, and Law and Order committees a sweat lodge, part of the traditional healing ceremonies available for use by *relatives* in the substance abuse programs.

FARMINGTON, N.M. — The Navajo Nation Council Health, Education, and Human Services and the Law and Order committees met in a joint committee work session at the Totah Behavioral Health Authority June 5 to hear the challenges and successes the Farmington-based organization is facing.

TBHA operates a variety of emotional wellness services. At the meeting, HEHSC and LOC members discussed the Joint Intervention Program and the Sobering Center, substance abuse programs where about 90 percent of patients seen in 2018 were Navajo.

Delegate Eugene Tso (Chinle) sits on the Law and Order Committee and told Totah's leadership that he appreciates the work they have done from the ground up in the nearly 20 years they have been in operation.

"We need more institutions like Totah in place for our Navajos suffering from addiction," said Eugene Tso (Chinle). "Right now, our jails are becoming overcrowded with the same people doing the same alcohol-related crimes; they are not getting the help they really need at all."

There are two programs that help relatives, as TBHA calls them, not patients or clients, start taking the first steps to overcoming addiction. The Joint Intervention Program targets those who frequently utilize the legal and health care systems due to untreated addiction issues. These relatives receive dormitory lodging during treatment and aftercare, intensive community support, and legal advocacy, with six days of programming per week.

The Sobering Center program is a person-centered intervention program designed for adults in San Juan County, N.M., who are suffering from an episode of alcohol or substance overuse. The 40-bed facility accepts men and women over the age of 18 and is considered a "front door" to intervention programs.

In 2018, relatives who participated in the JIP program decreased arrests by 53 percent, days in jail by 56 percent, Sobering Center stays by 58 percent, emergency room visits by 64 percent, and fire department responses by 84 percent, according to the authority's metrics.

"Everyone has worked really hard to make these programs so successful," said Kristine Carlson, program and clinical administrator at TBHA. "The main reason for that is the collaboration of all the partners."

One-third of outpatient services is traditional programming, which equals 3,267 hours provided last year. Some of those services include sweat lodges, talking circles in a traditional hogan, protection prayers, drumming circles, and other cultural activities.

"We have a constitution, which is K'é. It is not only clan, it is living a positive way of life," Delegate Tso said. "That's what we are here for when we were created; it was to live a positive way of life. What life really meant to Navajo generations before me was emotional, spiritual and physical growth in harmony."

TBHA said that it provided about \$400,000 in traditional services last year.

Totah Behavioral Health Authority is a service operating under Presbyterian Medical Services headquartered out of Santa Fe.

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