

From Words to Deeds VI: Changing the Paradigm for Criminal Justice and Mental Health **September 18, 2009**

EVENT WRAP-UP REPORT

Prepared September 28, 2009

OVERVIEW

Over the last seven years key decision-makers have convened “From Words to Deeds,” which has provided a unique forum for high-ranking officials representing state and county governments, the courts, criminal justice, corrections, and mental health to join together with a goal of developing and implementing collaborative strategies to improve efficiencies, increase access to care and ultimately improve treatment outcomes. This is the only forum in California known to include this many at such an elevated rank from such a wide range of sectors within mental health and criminal justice.

Words to Deeds has provided an opportunity for collaboration that did not exist previously by fostering unique partnerships among often traditional competitors: mental health directors, judges, and sheriffs. This program has now been institutionalized in these communities as the premiere assembly of policymakers who have the authority to implement innovative collaborations to improve access to care for those with mental health issues, to reduce incarceration of individuals with mental illness through disease management. Words to Deeds is known and respected throughout the state and across the country for its ability not only to convene high ranking officials but also to engage them and motivate them into action.

Participants have had the opportunity to interact with experts with whom they could not otherwise easily access. Words to Deeds has secured speakers to develop strategic partnerships and engage attendees. Workshop speakers included the following:

- California Prison Health Care Services Federal Receiver (2009): J. Clark Kelso rarely speaks to groups. He agreed to present at Words to Deeds VI based on the importance of the issue as well as the unique composition of the group and the proven sustainability of the workshop series.
- Secretary of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (2008): Then newly appointed Matthew Cate participated in a panel discussion and provided attendees with the opportunity to pose tough questions in an environment that fostered opportunities for solution driven discussions.
- Administrative Director of the California Courts (2007): Bill Vickery’s participation was critical in engaging the judiciary as a true partner with mental health and corrections. His remarks opened avenues for future collaboration among judges and local agencies.
- Deputy Director of the Mental Health Services Act (2006): Carol Hood’s participation was notable at a time when corrections and mental health were vying for funds from this new revenue source. Her discussion opened a dialogue about the need to create changes to improve access across systems.
- President of the National Association of Counties (2003): Ken Mayfield engaged county mental health directors in a way that previously had not been done: at a “criminal justice” forum. This paved the way for active involvement, and even leadership, by this key decision making (and customer) group.

Through thoughtful and strategic outreach, Words to Deeds has engaged the most knowledgeable, respected, and impactful leaders in corrections and mental health to form its Words to Deeds Leadership Group. As a result, an esteemed group of experts and policymakers in California is committed to advancing the Words to Deeds movement and have united to identify future funding opportunities for activities.

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

From Words to Deeds VI was held on Friday, September 18, 2009, in Woodland, hosted by the California State Sheriffs' Association Foundation and Yolo County Supervisor Helen Thomson, with special thanks to the City of Woodland Parks and Recreation Department and the Woodland Community and Senior Center. The workshop focused on moving from "words" to "deeds" by featuring speakers who have been successful through collaboration. The group also encouraged thought provoking discussions by participants from within regions, to encourage local groups to develop strategies to improve access. These discussion groups built upon the foundation of trust built through previous workshops.

Stanislaus County Sheriff-Coroner and California State Sheriffs' Association Sergeant at Arms Adam Christianson and opened the morning session by discussing the CSSA's commitment to implementing systems changes to keep people with mental illness out of jail while preserving public safety. Yolo County Supervisor Helen Thomson provided a brief history of the Words to Deeds efforts and introduced keynote speakers J. Clark Kelso and Sharon Aungst, both from the California Prison Health Care Services, Federal Receiver. Kelso and Aungst provided a rare opportunity to hear about plans to improve health care within corrections, from the agency charged with bringing an antiquated and substandard system into compliance. As a result, both the speakers and attendees gained a broadened perspective, and commitments were made to "co-create" viable plans for improved access to care.

A panel discussion, moderated by PBS documentary filmmaker Marc Shaffer, provided the opportunity for a county supervisor, county executive officer, sheriff's department representative and judge to discuss "Best Practices in Collaboration." This was the first time a journalist had participated in Words to Deeds and as a result, Shaffer is renewing his efforts to fundraise for a film about mental health care in corrections settings.

The afternoon was devoted to a roundtable discussion about how to move from "words to "deeds," with small groups discussing individual commitments to action within a 30-day timeframe. The group also brainstormed on how to find a future for Words to Deeds activities. Several options were discussed and at least three organizations committed to presenting a proposal to their governing boards for increased leadership in the effort (Forensic Mental Health Association, California Council on Mentally Ill Offenders, Urban County Caucus).

This year's workshop reinforced the necessity of the Words to Deeds forum, in its existing format. Real systems change has begun, and because of collaborations formed at Words to Deeds workshops, access has improved. However, there is still much to be done. Discussions at Words to Deeds VI uncovered the uncertainty involved with sustaining future Words to Deeds efforts, as well as the significant need to continue this forum to advance improved access to care.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Speakers at Words to Deeds VI included California Prison Health Care Services Federal Receiver J. Clark Kelso and deputy Sharon Aungst. This rare appearance by both indicated the significance of the Words to Deeds effort.
- Regional groups met to discuss how they can advance efforts within local jurisdictions. A Bay Area group developed a strategy and next steps, and appointed a leader (Jo Robinson – Member, California Council on Mentally Ill Offenders and Director, San Francisco County Jail Mental Health Services). The group is in the process of scheduling a follow up meeting.
- Although invitations went out with just one month's notice, Words to Deeds saw significant repeat attendees. This continuity has developed a strong core of leaders who are committed to a collaborative approach to improving access.

- High ranking representatives from 21 counties attended, including:

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| Alameda | Napa | San Joaquin |
| Calaveras | Orange | Santa Clara |
| Contra Costa | Sacramento | Shasta |
| Fresno | San Benito | Solano |
| Los Angeles | San Bernardino | Stanislaus |
| Lake | San Diego | Ventura |
| Monterey | San Francisco | Yolo |

- The following we represented: State agencies or organizations (19); Mental Health Directors (10); Corrections (9); Sheriffs (7); Judiciary (4); County Government (5).

NEXT STEPS

- Attendees requested a contact list of all attendees.
- Attendees requested that Words to Deeds materials be posted on a Web site for easy access.
- Attendees requested a document summarizing the outcomes and strategies discussed during the workshop, similar to the 2008 workshop recap. This booklet was effectively used as the basis for the 2009 workshop and served as a valuable tool for translating challenges into ideas and action.
- Leadership Group members requested a live follow up meeting.
- The Executive Director of the Forensic Mental Health Association will present a proposal to her governing board to coordinate Words to Deeds 2010 with their annual conference.
- Attendees requested more frequent interaction and Words to Deeds “products,” such as written information, a best practices resource guide and additional meetings and/or calls throughout the year.
- The group discussed converting Words to Deeds to an independent 501c3.