

## META Executive Summary

This report describes findings from a program evaluation of the Metamorphosis Therapeutic Community (Meta TC) program. Meta is a free community resource funded by Lutheran Services Florida (LSF) and Alachua County tax funds, and it is available to residents of: Alachua County; the Judicial Circuit 8 counties Levy, Gilchrist, Bradford, Union, and Baker; and the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) Northeast Region counties Citrus, Hernando, Sumter, Lake, Volusia, Flagler, St. Johns, Duval, Hamilton, Suwannee, Lafayette and Dixie.

The Evaluators gathered information using the following methods utilized on-site or through a virtual platform: planning meetings with relevant parties; review of program materials; interviews with County administrative, program, and partner agency staff; separate focus groups with active Meta clients and graduates; chart reviews; on-site observation of facility and program activities; and fidelity assessment.

Although the different evaluation methods each provided a nuanced perspective, several common themes emerged across the various methodologies. Key themes related to program strengths include dedicated staff; client satisfaction; high degree of fidelity to the TC model; high degree of structure in the daily schedule; overall level of program funding; transitional housing; and good relations with jail, probation, and court. The main theme related to program challenges is lack of staffing, which in turn is associated with many of the following additional related challenges: lack of staff expertise in mental health (licensed clinical), addiction, and community-based motivational interviewing; lack of individual counseling and family-based counseling; corrections culture with most staff more experienced with corrections-based as opposed to community-based behavioral health services; high rate of clients leaving against staff advice (AWOL) shortly after arriving at Meta; lack of discretionary funds for incentives to help motivate residents; lack of outings that could help motivate residents and provide time for staff-resident bonding outside of the facility; lack of staff availability for transports; lack of focus on job preparation early in program; prohibition of family and support network involvement early in program; and other prohibitive rules such as no candy, coffee, or smoking. Based on these findings, the following recommendations are provided in the areas of staffing, programming, public relations, and service enhancements/areas for training.

Staffing: Lack of staffing manpower was the biggest challenge that emerged across several evaluation methods. It will be important to prioritize applicants with the following qualifications, backgrounds, and experience:

- Peer Support Specialists (with a focus on Meta successful graduates) who could help create a culture that clients interpret as more welcoming and friendly
- Community-based mental health expertise (e.g., Licensed Mental Health Counselors)
- Community-based addiction and co-occurring disorders treatment experience
- Ability to speak Spanish

Programming: Meta should consider implementing the following adjustments:

- Shorten the length of stay within program phases for residents who are able to advance through the program phases more quickly
- Incorporate additional best / promising practices that could be used to augment the program
- Provide more recreational activities outside the facility (e.g., field trips to parks, museums, etc.)
- Relax the rules regarding access to caffeine and sugar
- Find more ways to include clients' supportive family members and other members of their support network early in treatment, when available

Public Relations: Meta staff should present information about program and its successes to the local community to help:

- Raise awareness within the community that Meta is an available resource
- Increase self-referrals
- Increase referrals from additional community partners

Service Enhancements / Areas for Training: Train staff in the following areas:

- Basic and advanced training in Motivational Interviewing (MI) from a non-corrections agency
- De-Escalation techniques
- Co-Occurring mental health and addictions
- Medication management