

My name is Kathy Hughes, I am a parent of an adolescent that has a DX of schizoaffective disorder with co-occurring substances abuse. I am also a Family Specialist with Nevada PEP (Parents Encouraging Parents) working on their Collaborating for Children (CfC) project.

Nevada PEP is family focused-community based support services for families of children with disabilities. Nevada PEP has two programs that deal specifically with families that have children with Severe Emotional Disturbances. Our Neighborhood Care Centers in Las Vegas and Collaborating for Children-statewide.

Neighborhood Care Centers provide an accessible, single point of contact where children with emotional, behavioral and mental health issues and their families define their strengths and needs. Collaborating for Children works to expand and strengthen the collaboration among family members, policy-makers and service providers to enhance the development of policies, programs and quality assurance activities leading to increased family satisfaction and successful outcomes for children and adolescents with disabilities.

I've already spoken with Courtney about giving a presentation to the commission about these two programs and what we've found that works, some suggestions about improvements for families of children with severe emotional disturbances during the November 4th meeting.

EXHIBIT <u>K</u>	MentalHealth	Document consists of <u>4</u> pages
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Entire document provided.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Due to size limitations, pages ____ through ____ provided.	
A copy of the complete document is available through the Research Library (775-684-6827 or e-mail library@icb.state.nv.us).		
		Meeting Date <u>10-21-03</u>

I would like to close my comments on a personal note. As I said earlier, I am a parent of an adolescent with a mental illness. As the Freedom Commission found, many parents have to place their children into the child welfare or juvenile justice systems to obtain the mental health services they need. I am one of those parents. My son had a history of severe emotional disturbances as a child, but it was not until December of 2002 that his behaviors started escalating. A Marine recruiter convinced my son that he was one of the "few good men" and told him that in order to get into the Marines he would need to be off all his meds. I would like to say the recruiter checked both my son's physical and mental conditions, but he did not. Even my warnings fell on deaf ears and I was labeled an overprotective mother. As Cassey went off his medicines his behaviors became more and more out of control. He was incorrigible, abusing drugs and alcohol, skipping school, running away and having minor skirmishes with the law. Many times the police were called to our house to report him either as a runaway or incorrigible. My husband and I both tried to find resources and help for our son, we were told repeatedly by a social worker, psychiatrists and juvenile justice people that he needed to first get into the juvenile justice system to get help. Many times when the police would come to my house to take an incorrigible or runaway report they would tell me that this was a family problem; they made me feel like I was imposing on them. My husband is a Sparks Police Officer and many of the Reno Officers coming to our house knew this and I was still treated this way. I can only imagine how other families outside of the "police family" are treated. Finally, at the end of March, we had to admit Cassey to West Hills

Hospital because we felt that he was a danger to himself and others and needed acute care. He spent five days there and it was recommended that he be transferred to Willow Springs Treatment Center.

Unfortunately for us there was no bed available at Willow Springs and he was transferred to the McGee Center to wait for a bed. Though it was in his release plan that he stay at the Mc Gee Center until a bed opened up at Willow Springs the Mc Gee Center did not honor this request. I was told to either come pick him up or they would give him a bus pass. My husband and I tried contacting our limited resources to find an alternative placement to no avail. On Friday, April 11th, Cassey was released to our custody and on the night of April 13th he ran away. He was gone for over five weeks before he showed back up on our doorstep on May 28th. Because he had missed a court date in Juvenile Court there was a warrant for his arrest and he was taken to Wittenberg Juvenile Hall. On June 5th Cassey was court ordered to successfully complete a treatment program at Willow Springs. Cassey has now been at Willow Springs for more than four months and still has a ways to go.

My husband, Cassey and I are now just beginning a life long journey to get him the services, treatment and tools he will need to have a productive and successful adult life.

I believe that there needs to be more education and collaboration between agencies that deal with children, adolescents and their families that are living with severe emotional disturbances. Collaboration with system of care providers and the community ensures solutions that create positive changes. I look forward to coming to the commission with suggestions on November 4th. Thank you for letting me speak.