

Continuum gets piece of meth money

BY MARJORIE BEGGS

ANY day now, Continuum, which serves people with HIV and AIDS, will get new money and personnel to serve its meth-using Tenderloin clients: \$191,799 over three years from the feds plus staff from two treatment programs outside the TL who will work at Continuum.

Technically, the money from SAMHSA (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) — part of a \$1.5 million grant to San Francisco agencies — has been available since Sept. 1, but it was late December before the Board of Supervisors retroactively accepted it.

"That's not at all unusual, but it is frustrating," said Dr. Alice Gleghorn, DPH director of Grant Research, Evaluation and Development for Community Behavioral Health Services, the city department that will oversee the grant. "We applied for the SAMHSA money in June, and they take three to five months to review."

More months are eaten up by scheduling, Gleghorn said: The supes' City Services Committee reviews the offer, then recommends that the full board authorize DPH to spend the grant, and that takes two weekly readings.

Continuum's windfall will mean that, for the first time since it was founded in 1987, it can serve a growing population of Tenderloin methamphetamine users in their own neighborhood.

"Meth use is strongly correlated with HIV and AIDS and also with psychosis," said Continuum Executive Director Mark Cloutier. "Previously, we'd refer users elsewhere for services. There was a high probability that they

wouldn't get to their appointment."

There is a meth "crisis" in San Francisco, according to Gleghorn's memo to the supes and the Health Commission that accompanied the SAMHSA proposal. The city's "rate of methamphetamine mentions is nearly seven times higher than the average rate for metropolitan areas included in DAWN." In 2002, San Francisco's rate was more than double Los Angeles' and a third higher than San Diego's.

DAWN is a pretty acronym for unpretty events. The Drug Abuse Warning Network is a health surveillance system that collects reports from hundreds of U.S. hospitals about "mentions" — the drugs that contributed to emergency department visits and deaths. It monitors thousands of illegal, prescription and over-the-counter drugs, alcohol and nonprescription inhalants, and uses the sampling to give a nationwide picture of drug use, misuse and abuse.

The number of meth mentions jumped from 49 per 100,000 population in 1998 to 91 per 100,000 population in 2002 in the 16 San Francisco metropolitan area emergency rooms that were part of the DAWN sample — San Francisco and Marin and San Mateo counties. In 2003, the S.F. metropolitan sample area changed to San Francisco and Oakland and included 13 emergency rooms.

Cloutier said the SAMHSA grant will enable Continuum to provide assessment, counseling and psych medication management to 30 meth users a year, 90 unduplicated clients over the three years.

Cloutier called those clients the tip of the iceberg, but a good start considering meth users don't like to participate in programs like this.

Continuum also will offer clients a tangible

reason to get clean, he said. Every time their urine tests are negative, money goes into an account they can use for housing, clothes and other needs, up to a max of \$300 in a three-month cycle.

Continuum's portion of the SAMHSA grant is just over 10%, which will fund a half-time peer advocate, a quarter-time administrative assistant, 10% of a program director's salary, plus some operating expenses.

Community Behavioral Health Services gets \$221,000 for two part-time epidemiologists and a part-time health educator.

The lion's share of the grant, more than \$1 million, will go to UCSF and S.F. General for two programs they administer: STOP (Stimulant Treatment Outpatient Program), an outpatient treatment program to reduce cocaine and methamphetamine abuse and dependence, and the Stonewall Project, a harm-reduction program for substance-abusing gay and bisexual men.

STOP and Stonewall will send counselors to Continuum as well as to Magnet, a health promotion center for gay men in the Castro.

In all, the \$1.5 million grant will allow Continuum and Magnet to provide services for 240 meth users.

San Francisco's grant is part of SAMSHA's \$35 million program for fiscal 2004-05 — 24 grants nationwide to expand or enhance access to treatment in locales facing emerging substance abuse problems. Alameda and Marin counties also received \$1.5 million grants for methamphetamine treatment services this year. ■

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Mark Cloutier
CONTINUUM
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Benefit district's next steps

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

disproportionate input from them," Gold said. "As we move to the next stage, then we'll need input from others."

FORMATION STAGE

The steering committee meeting concluded with two voice votes of participants: Should the working boundaries be accepted? Should the project move from "investigation" to "formation"? With a few abstentions, the answers were aye.

Li Mandri made it clear that if the group wanted a benefit district up and running by January 2006, it needed to get cracking: Write a plan right away for how the district will be managed; by April get petitions signed and to the supes, who must resolve to establish the district; hold public hearings and form a nonprofit to manage the district in June and July; seek a lender for advance funds in September. The city then would collect the first assessments via property bills in December. Fall down in the schedule, he said, and you'll have to wait until January 2007 to get the money. But he said that it should take as long as necessary to get everyone on the same page.

That's something they all agreed on.

In the other neighborhoods planning community benefit districts, Castro/Upper Market, like the Tenderloin, has just voted to move to the formation state, Li Mandri said. Japantown, Fillmore Jazz, Fisherman's Wharf and Noe Valley are still checking out the idea.

After the meeting, Gold said it was probably time to start involving more people and spreading the word in the neighborhood. She suggested that anyone who wants to participate call Zamora at 440-7569 or e-mail her at ezamora@sbcglobal.net. Those with specific concerns can use that same number and e-mail to leave messages for resident and NOMNIC board member Lea Curry. ■

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