



MISSISSIPPI STATE HOSPITAL

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FRIENDS OF MISSISSIPPI STATE HOSPITAL AND HUDSPETH CENTER THANK LEGISLATORS FOR SUPPORT

WHITFIELD— More than 150 volunteers, supporters, and employees of the state’s public mental health system gathered at Galloway United Methodist Church on Tuesday, January 29 for an annual show of appreciation to Mississippi’s legislators.

Hosted by two volunteer organizations, Friends of Mississippi State Hospital and Friends of Hudspeth Center, the appreciation luncheon honored and thanked the state’s legislators for their support of the Department of Mental Health each legislative session. The volunteer groups are both active throughout the year promoting understanding of mental health and intellectual and developmental disabilities, but they take time early each year to thank Mississippi’s legislators, whose support helps the Department of Mental Health provide services to residents across the state.

“Our Friends groups host this event every year because they believe it is very important to do one simple thing, and that is to say thank you to the people who support us in our work. We have no better group of supporters than the members of the Mississippi Legislature,” MSH Director James G. Chastain said.

“We thank you today on behalf of the thousands of individuals and families who have received services from us with your support, and we thank you on behalf of the very talented staff who work every day in our programs to help individuals along the road to recovery. I can tell you they all appreciate your support.”

The legislators in attendance had the opportunity to hear firsthand from several Mississippians who have been positively impacted by the services available through DMH. Shane Garrard, Director of Treatment at Fairland Treatment Center in Clarksdale, spoke about his struggles with chemical dependency and how he once received treatment at the center where he now works.

“I didn’t start using substances because of anything my mom or dad did. I had the most loving, caring, extended family. There was no reason for me to be an addict,” Garrard said. “It didn’t seem like a big deal. I’d have fun, hang out with friends, and smoke some marijuana. The only problem was I just couldn’t stop. My friends stopped and became productive members of society. I didn’t.”

“My drug use continued. It was a snowball that just kept rolling down a mountain and I didn’t have any control over it. I truly believed that I was only harming myself, but we all know I was destroying everyone’s life, including my own,” he said.

When he finally realized he had to get clean, Garrard said he didn't want to leave the treatment center because he only knew people who abused substances. So he took a job at the treatment center, eventually becoming a counselor and then moving on to finish his bachelor's degree and obtain his master's degree.

"I love working in the mental health system," he said. "It gives me my fire and it gives me my hope. I know when I'm working with those hard-to-work-with people that I'm working with myself. I was that person, but there is hope behind that.

"That's what the state hospitals give, and that's what the community mental health centers give, and that's what you give when you support these programs."

Legislators also heard from Jane Smith, a teacher with the Rankin County School District, and Patrick Graves, a client served through Hudspeth Regional Center. Smith has worked with Graves in a transitional program called Phase II that helps individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities develop social, recreational and job-related skills that aid in the successful transition to the working world.

"One of my students I had the great privilege of teaching is Patrick Graves," Smith said. "He's a great worker, has developed great work skills and self-esteem. Most importantly, Patrick is happy, he has friends, and he's a productive member of society."

Graves shared his story, making sure to note the accomplishments he has been able to achieve through the help of programs like Phase 2 and Hudspeth Center. He noted that he has his own job, his own apartment, his own bank account, and more.

"With the help of Phase 2, I got my own job, which helped me gain more skills, and now I can do anything I want to do in life," he said.

MSH, a program of the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, was founded in 1855 and facilitates improvement in the quality of life for Mississippians who are in need of mental health, chemical dependency or nursing home services by rehabilitating to the least restrictive environment and utilizing a range of psychiatric and medical services that reflect the accepted standard of care and are in compliance with statutory and regulatory guidelines. The hospital is accredited by the Joint Commission.

- 30 -

PHOTOS ATTACHED:

Legislative Luncheon 1 – Pictured are (l to r) Rankin County School District Phase 2 teacher Jane Smith, Hudspeth Center client Patrick Graves, Fairland Treatment Center Director of Treatment Shane Garrard, Mississippi State Hospital Director James G. Chastain, and Hudspeth Regional Center Director Mike Harris. Garrard and Graves spoke at a legislative appreciation event on Tuesday, Jan. 29 that thanked Mississippi legislators for their support of the state's public mental health system.

Legislative Luncheon 2 – Attendees at the legislative appreciation luncheon rise for applause after hearing Patrick Graves speak. Graves spoke about overcoming his own challenges to live successfully independently. Garrard also spoke about overcoming his own battles with chemical dependency.