



## NEWS RELEASE

# “Alternatives to the Prison Pipeline” Symposium Reinforces Collaboration and Results

**Monroe, LA – May 4, 2017** - Northeast Delta Human Services Authority ([NE Delta HSA](#)), which directs the operation of community-based services for citizens with mental health issues, addictive disorders, developmental disabilities and prevention programs, sponsored a public symposium on Tuesday, in partnership with the National Alliance on Mental Illness – Ruston Chapter (NAMI Ruston).

At the Symposium, which was held at the Ruston Civic Center, experts discussed solutions to help reduce the high rate of incarceration and recidivism among citizens who suffer from serious mental illnesses and addictions. Keynote speaker Dr. Monteic A. Sizer, NE Delta HSA Executive Director, emphasized how “You cannot solve a problem at the same level of consciousness that created it.” This perspective encourages collaboration toward a regional vision that reduces the effects of the serious behavioral healthcare issues we face in northeast Louisiana and across the state.

Public servants, community members, students and regional experts in law enforcement, behavioral health, education and faith-based organizations comprised the nearly 400 symposium attendees.

Speakers included:

- Keynote Speaker Dr. Monteic A. Sizer, Executive Director, NE Delta HSA
- Mike Shipp, NE Delta HSA Board Member
- Sheriff Mike Stone, Lincoln Parish Sheriff's Department
- Mayor Edward Jones, City of Grambling
- John Belton, Third Judicial District Attorney, Lincoln and Union Parishes
- Robert Flowers, Clinical Therapist, Family Counseling Center, Ruston
- Dr. Ellen Smiley, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Grambling State University
- Eldonta Osborne, CEO, Boys and Girls Clubs of North Central Louisiana
- Gloria Mays, Executive Director, Elisha Ministries Supportive Housing of Northeast Louisiana
- Clay Walker, Attorney, Director of Juvenile Services, Caddo Parish Juvenile Court, Shreveport
- Reverend Woods Watson, Pastor of Senior Adult and Pastoral Care, First Baptist Church, West Monroe
- Nicole McGee, Executive Director, National Alliance on Mental Illness, Louisiana Chapter
- Dr. Tiffany Bates, Assistant Professor, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Department, Louisiana Tech University
- Dr. Carolyn Hunt, Executive Director, H.E.A.R.T.S. Coalition, Symposium Emcee

"We will revisit this topic further in 2017," said Dr. Sizer. "The goal of these law enforcement and mental health symposiums is to help prevent citizens with serious mental health issues and addictions from becoming incarcerated, and to help ensure those who are released from jails and prisons can successfully re-enter their communities as productive citizens."

"The Symposium acknowledges how we can come together as a region and utilize the resources available to us to bring ideas and a vision forward to solve problems," Dr. Sizer said. "We hope to continue to catalyze positive movement on these serious issues. Our region's health depends on it. We know that no single agency or organization can solve these problems alone. We must continue to work together to ensure that our citizens can envision a healthy and prosperous life."

Steven Rogers, Police Chief of the Ruston Police Department, gave impassioned remarks at the Symposium. "Mental illness is not a crime," he said, "It's an illness. Jail is not the answer to this issue."

"At the end of the day, the answer to this problem is providing treatment and services," said John Belton, Third Judicial District Attorney, Lincoln and Union Parishes. "Re-investment in facilities that help offenders who are addicted to drugs and also for mental health offenders is essential."

Mike Stone, Lincoln Parish Sheriff, mentioned that “Jails and prisons are not the place for the seriously mentally ill.”

“There are existing coalitions in place that are funded with philanthropic, state and federal dollars to help focus attention on successful citizen community re-entry,” said Dr. Sizer. We are contributing to this work at NE Delta HSA by creating programs like our [Second Opportunity Workforce Solutions \(SOWS\) program](#). This program provides supportive employment services to citizens who are clients of NE Delta HSA and its integrative behavioral and primary healthcare network, including citizens who are non-violent criminal offenders who are in treatment with NE Delta HSA upon discharge from regional jails and prisons.”

The NE Delta HSA also created the NE Delta HSA Opportunity Zone in an effort to help transform fragile communities and people living on the margins of society. The NE Delta HSA Opportunity Zone grew out of the agency’s regional Faith-Based Mental Health community summits. The Opportunity Zone is one of three NE Delta HSA-initiated regional coalitions that are designed to transform communities and reduce mental health and addiction prevalence, improve primary healthcare outcomes, reduce crime rates, enhance school and academic performance, equip faith and community leaders, increase job opportunities and establish and support public policies.

“The NE Delta HSA Opportunity Zone is truly about community hope and opportunity. It is about personal responsibility and self-sufficiency,” said Dr. Sizer. “It is about honest dialogue toward positive change and a laser-like focus on results,” he said. “We support south Monroe as a place where families can thrive, schools and businesses can flourish, neighborhoods are safe and houses of worship are the bedrock of the community.”

The importance of societal health determinants were also discussed at the symposium. Studies show that access to healthcare, education, housing, community services for youth, and other supports, can improve regional mental health and primary health outcomes, even within challenging societal environments.

[Click here](#) to see photos from the Symposium on the NE Delta HSA Facebook page.

[Click here](#) to see mental health and crime statistics in last month’s Law Enforcement/ Mental Health Symposium NE Delta HSA press release

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### **About Northeast Delta Human Services Authority (Northeast Delta HSA)**

Northeast Delta HSA directs the operation of community-based programs to improve the quality of life of people with major mental illness, developmental disabilities and addictive disorders. Northeast Delta HSA is devoted to deliver programs and services that encourage people to reach their true human potential.

Three tenets guide our efforts: excellent customer service, greater access to services and competent, quality care. Northeast Delta HSA serves citizens in 12 parishes of northeastern Louisiana: Caldwell, East Carroll, West Carroll, Ouachita, Lincoln, Madison, Franklin, Morehouse, Jackson, Tensas, Richland and Union. For more information, please call 318-362-3270.

### **About National Alliance on Mental Illness – Ruston Chapter (NAMI Ruston)**

NAMI Ruston is a 30-year-old, nonprofit mental health organization. Its mission statement is “Striving to Improve Lives” of persons and their families struggling with a mental health condition or addictive disorder. NAMI Ruston serves Lincoln, Ouachita, Bienville, Claiborne, Jackson and Union Parishes. It is a local affiliate of NAMI Louisiana, and NAMI National, headquartered in Arlington, Virginia.

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