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News for Immediate Release

PORTAGE COUNTY GROUP TRAVELS SOUTH TO PRESENT AT NATIONAL CIT CONFERENCE

KENT, Ohio (November 17, 2008) –A small group from Portage County recently traveled to Atlanta Georgia to present “Little County, Big CIT” at the National CIT Conference. CIT stands for Crisis Intervention Team. It is a nationally recognized program for police officers to educate them about mental health, how to work with mental health clients in crisis, assist mental health clients in the community find resources and services, and also collaborate with mental health systems when an emergency occurs.

Members of the group included: Emily Ribnik, Coleman Access Pre-screener; Joe Bocchicchio, Coleman Professional Services Case Manager and Hospital Liaison; Becky Dempster, Chief Officer of Coleman Access; Dennis Missimi, Director of Special Projects for the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Portage County; Officer Andy Suvada, Streetsboro Police Department and his wife Carrie, Special Education Teacher at Waterloo Schools; and Officer Jeff Futo of the Kent State University Police Department.

The presentation’s goal was to focus on the positive nationally recognized collaboration of the mental health system and law enforcement. Missimi presented on the history and growth of the CIT program in Portage County, which has existed since 2005. The rest of the group members spoke about different ways the mental health agencies (primarily Coleman Professional Services and Coleman Access) and the police officers collaborate to assist clients seeking and needing treatment. Ribnik also presented on the psychiatric evaluation process and how Access works with police officers during emergencies.

“The CIT program provides police officers with added education and skills for working with community members that have mental health issues, specifically when they are in crisis. CIT is seen as both a jail diversion program and an officer safety initiative. Departments that have CIT

programs are seeing decreases in community complaints against officers, as well as fewer incidents of force needed and assaults on officers,” Ribnik said.

In Portage County, CIT has helped bridge the gaps between the police departments and the mental health agencies - giving the officers the necessary skills and information to help community members get linked to treatment, instead of having charges pressed.

Other presentations the group attended at the conference included: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), working with returning veterans, mental illness of the homeless, expanding and improving CIT programs, and police suicide awareness.

Coleman Professional Services is a nationally recognized not-for-profit provider of behavioral health and rehabilitation programs that improve the lives of individuals, families and businesses in Northeast Ohio. The company relies on an enterprise business model to diversify its funding. Coleman’s foundation and three enterprise companies produce more than 25 percent of the company’s funding for its award-winning programs.

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