



MERC Meeting Summary

July 16th, 2026

Presentation:

Laura Kane started Marshmallow's Hope in memory of her son Zachary Ryan Birkholz, a 14-year-old Harlem Freshman, died by suicide in 2018. Sadly, Laura was unaware that her child was suffering in silence. Depression and Suicide were foreign topics to her until the tragedy of these silent killers affected her in the worst way. Marshmallow's Hope, is a dedicated group of counselors committed to supporting the mental health of our community by providing services to youth and families for suicide prevention, mentoring, and providing protective factors. Their team brings together diverse backgrounds in mental health, counseling, and trauma-informed care to provide empathetic and personalized support to those navigating through loss and grief.

Conveniently Located at 2810 Frank Scott Parkway unit 812 Belleville IL

Services provided include Intensive Home Based and Outpatient services:

Mental Health Counseling for ages 9-17 and 18-26,

Therapeutic support Groups, Parent Education, Suicide Prevention School Assemblies and Community Presentations

You can reach Marshmallow's Hope at 1-888-277-4028 for information or check out their website at www.marshmallowshope.org.

Discussion Items:

- MERC is working with our community partners and council members to plan a Movie Night in the Park Sept 25/26. This will be a family-friendly stigma reduction event available to the public. MERC will be sharing resources related to recovery/treatment efforts and community partners are welcome to attend.
 - What we still need: Snacks/Drinks, help with set up & Possible location (outdoor preferred). If you would like to partner with us on this event or provide materials/food, please reach out to Mark.
- Discussion on the impact report for FY26 (July 2025-June 2026). This is a requirement for our grant, but we wanted to share to highlight the great work this group has done over the past year. Full report is attached.
- We will be sending out an evaluation survey by the end of July to assess how we can improve things that we can improve. Please be on the lookout for that in your inbox, we value your input!

Workgroup updates:

- Thanks so much to those who have attended our workgroup meetings. If you have volunteered in the past to participate in one of the workgroups, please contact Mark/Katie to confirm you're still able to participate, we encourage all members to add their experience, strength and hope. With Gratitude Thank you.

Announcements/upcoming events:

- Please see all attached flyers for the upcoming events:
- At the Edwardsville Library there are monthly Stigma Conversations along with a Naloxone Demonstration. The next event will be held July 23rd at 6pm. Check the Library Facebook page for upcoming schedule. A link to the Facebook page can be found on their website [Home | Edwardsville Public Library](#).

Council Members in Attendance:

Angella Holloway- St. Clair County ROSC
Bev Holland- CHS Region 5 TA
Cameo Jones-CEO L.I.V. Recovery
Cheyney Evans-Director of Outreach & Ed
Christina Manchen-CCBHC Coordinator
Centerstone
Conswala Jones-St. Clair County ROSC
Cora Hughes- United Congregation of
Metro East
Dustin Percy- Oxford House
Jen Nagel-Fischer-Porchlight Collective
Joe Jackson- St. Clair County 708 Mental
Health Board
Jovanna Herron-CHS Metro Link
K Short- CHS/BASE Grant

Katie Wilson-Madison County ROSC
Kristen Anderson-CHS
Logan Garner-Marshmallows Hope
Mark Knott-Madison County ROSC
Mike Luther-CHS OEND/DOPP
Paul Fischer-Porch Light Collective
Rhonda Comwell-Washington/Randolph
County ROSC Coordinator
Samantha Bandy-Franklin/Williamson
County's ROSC Coordinator
Sheridan Jordan-Clinton County ROSC
Stephanie Everheart-CHS
Teresa Cornelius-HSHS-HFG/SJH
Towana Howard-St. Clair Health Dept.
Violette Book- CHS/OEND Team

Guest in attendance

Laura Kane-Founder of Marshmallows Hope

MERC Upcoming Zoom Meeting

**Aug 20th, 2026, at 9am/ Target group meeting TBD we will
send a zoom link the day before the meeting**

Metro East Recovery Council (MERC) Vision:

A community system that nurtures and supports individuals and families
seeking or maintaining recovery for themselves or a loved one.

Recovery Oriented Systems of Care (ROSC) Mission:

Collaborating to build and empower communities of recovery.