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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **SWFAS TO HOST THANK YOU EVENT FOR PILOT TRIAGE PROJECT**

Southwest Florida Addiction Services (SWFAS) will host a luncheon Fri., June 29, to announce the success of the pilot triage project and to thank participating community agencies.

The luncheon will be at the SWFAS Transitional Living Center Pavilion at 2516 Grand Ave. in Fort Myers from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Among those invited to attend are local state representatives and senators and the Lee County Commission as well as officials from the Fort Myers Police Department, Lee County Human Services, Lee Mental Health, Salvation Army, and SWFAS.

The Florida Legislature last year awarded \$200,000 to start the pilot project, which refers individuals in need of mental health and substance abuse services to appropriate agencies for help. The goal is to reduce use of more expensive services such as jails and local emergency rooms.

“We are very pleased with the success of the project so far,” said SWFAS CEO Kevin B. Lewis. “So far, 97 individuals have been referred to the triage team and 59 percent have successfully been linked to appropriate services. These are people who otherwise would have wound up in our emergency rooms or jails, which are not equipped to manage the needs of those with substance abuse issues or who have a mental illness.”

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The triage team was formed last November among Lee Mental Health, SWFAS and the Salvation Army to meet and assess individuals referred for services by the Fort Myers Police Department and other law enforcement agencies.

Lee County officials submitted a request in 2005 to the State Legislature for \$3.6 million in funding for the new triage center that included plans to operate a new facility on Evans Avenue adjacent to the new SWFAS Detoxification Center that is slated to break ground later this year.

In 2006, although the full request was not approved, \$200,000 was appropriated for the pilot “Triage Project.”

“The team members have met people literally on the streets, in parks, in the woods – because we have no center to take them. The team received referrals from law enforcement and team members then went out to find the person needing assistance,” said Rosemary Boisvert of SWFAS.

Among the services received were detoxification services, residential treatment, halfway house placement, emergency shelter, groceries, eyeglasses, clothing, household goods, permanent housing placement, and even a glass eye, according to Boisvert.

Officials are hopeful that the success of the project eventually will convince the State Legislature to appropriate the funds needed to build the triage center.