

## **Mental Health Study – 2006 to 2008**

By Debra Cronmiller, Study Chairperson

In the last two year's the League of Women Voters of Appleton has taken a critical look at our local mental health delivery system and presents tonight the culmination of our work in the form of a proposed position on Mental Health to be added to our current local Position Papers.

The Mental Health Study Committee set out to collect information from our community regarding:

- the needs, range of issues, and treatments available for those living with mental illness,
- the services currently in place to meet the needs of the population,
- the gaps or missing links in services available to those living in our community, especially those reliant on the county mental health systems, and
- the impact of service gaps on other area providers (for example transportation, police and housing providers).

During the course of our study, other local organizations, such as ThedaCare's CHAT (Community Health Action Team) also were examining like issues. CHAT sponsored a full day "plunge" on the barriers to accessing mental health services in October of 2006 and some of their observations and conclusions were incorporated into the study materials we used.

The League also assembled its own panel of experts to discuss the current mental health deliver system including crisis services and long term care services in both the public and private environments. Guest speakers at our forum included Diane Mandler representing the County Mental Health system, Steve Kromholz representing the private mental health provider system, and Peg McGaffy from the Fox Cities Community Health Center representing our non-profit sector. This forum also created an opportunity for an excellent discussion of local gaps and how best to recruit and retain the psychiatric professionals needed to meet the mental health needs of those in our community.

Our Committee was well rounded and had representation both from the League and ad hoc members from our community. My sincere thanks go to all our League members that participated and Tom Tatlock, Diane Mandler, and Mary Wisnet for their faithful participation in this study and their thoughtful contributions to the proposed position. Now the ball is in your court. Affirming this position will allow the League of Women Voters of Appleton to be more effective in our advocacy for greater access to mental health services and an enhanced, regional system of delivery that will benefit all users. Affirming this position will, in fact, create an opportunity for the League to be instrumental in creating the identified necessary changes in the way our community thinks about Mental Health services and delivery.