

February 14, 2008

A First STEP to Better Health

WHAT IS STEP?

The Specialized Treatment Early in Psychosis (STEP) Program opened in March 2006 at the DMHAS Connecticut Mental Health Center (CMHC) in New Haven. Individuals who are in the early stages of a psychotic illness, regardless of insurance status or residence in the CMHC catchment area, are offered a detailed evaluation and a package of enriched treatments. Signs of psychotic illnesses can include: paranoia, hallucinations, delusions, odd behavior or thinking, isolating, disorganization, emotional changes, and difficulty with work or school.



HOW STEP CAN HELP

As with physical illness, treatment early in the course of a mental illness, such as psychosis, can lead to better outcomes. The longer the illness is left untreated, the greater the disruption to the person's ability to meet the demands of transition into adulthood: school, work, meeting new people, and becoming independent. Several studies suggest that comprehensive, phase-specific interventions are more effective than usual care in promoting a better course of illness for individuals early in the course of psychotic illness.

SERVICES PROVIDED AT STEP

- Clinical Evaluations and Assessment
- Medication with Regular Evaluation
- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
- Family Education and Support
- Cognitive Remediation
- Individual Therapy and Case Management
- Neuropsychological Testing
- Educational and Employment Support
- Cognitive Behavioral Group Therapy
- Community Education



The mean age of STEP program participants is 23 years. Referrals come from diverse clinical and non-clinical sources statewide. Among them are hospitals, clinics, private practitioners, high schools, advocacy groups and family members.

Outcomes from the STEP Program

The early results from the STEP program are very encouraging. For example, after 6 months in the STEP program, most individuals:

- Experience a reduction in psychotic symptoms (both positive and negative symptoms)
- Are working 20 hours or more per week
- Report having 3 or more close friends
- Are not suffering from drug abuse or dependence
- Continue to live independently in the community
- Report a decrease in suicidal thoughts

Testimonials from STEP Participants

"The program so far has been extremely helpful in all ways, including individual and group help. I strongly recommend the STEP program to anyone who feels they are having a difficult time and need help progressing or moving on in a positive and influential direction."

--20 year old participant

"Thank God for this program – it's a blessing. People don't realize that these young people don't have any place to go where they would feel comfortable. I've talked to some of the older patients here and they didn't have anything like this when they were coming up. My son has come so far and I can just see how much better he's getting."

--Mother of participant