



Connecticut's Recovery-Oriented Service System

By Emma C. Redmond

In September 2002, Connecticut Commissioner Thomas A. Kirk, Jr., Ph.D., signed a policy statement "Promoting A Recovery-Oriented Service System" that set a new direction for the State. This statement formally designated the concept of "recovery" as the overarching goal of the service system operated and funded by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).

The Connecticut State agency declared its intent to "firmly embed the language, spirit, and culture of recovery throughout the system of services," and to acknowledge recovery as a process, not an event. These guiding principles will be used to address the needs of individuals over time across the full range of services from engagement to intervention, treatment, rehabilitative and supportive services. These principles were to apply equally to health promotion and prevention services for those having or at risk of mental illness and substance use disorders.

Critical components of this new service system are a network of Centers of Excellence—provider agencies that would serve as national models for innovation and excellence in key recovery-oriented service areas. The Centers, which are supported by CSAT, promote systems change by introducing and piloting state-of-the-art program practices. They are learning and "living" laboratories for knowledge acquisition and knowledge transfer. Richard

Fisher, Director of Education and Training, says that the agencies that competed to participate in this initiative were the "early adapters"—the ones most interested in furthering best practices. They were not motivated by monetary incentives, because DMHAS could offer no special funding for this effort.

The current Centers of Excellence focus on the following:

- Supported employment
- Co-occurring disorders
- Recovery management through telephone follow-up intervention
- Recovery management services (face-to-face peer outreach)
- Trauma sensitive services

According to James Siemianowski, Senior Policy Advisor, the emphasis of the Centers is on "doing things differently," rather than simply adding more components to current operations. The primary goal is to develop relatively low-cost ways of following clients for longer periods during their recovery and for re-engaging them if necessary. Centers of Excellence provider agencies receive intensive weekly training for approximately three months and are subsequently given ongoing technical assistance and consultation on a less frequent basis. In return, these agencies serve as training and internship sites for staff from other provider organizations and interested parties.

The projects last for six months, after which an evaluation is conducted to determine whether the practices that were instituted made a difference to people in recovery. The evaluation also gathers information about the factors that facilitated change, as well as those that acted as barriers to change.

What lessons have the DMHAS staff learned from these Centers to date? Deputy Commissioner Pat Rehmer said, "We need

to ensure that we align all of our policies and resources to support recovery-oriented care. This means that we must review all aspects of administration, contracting, policy formulation and service delivery. It's a big job, but it's vitally important and worth the effort. By supporting the recovery initiative, we're making tangible improvements in the lives of thousands of people and communities throughout the State. ”

The DMHAS staff members believe that commitment to these Centers must come from all levels of the provider organization, members of the recovery community, and the State agency. For such a transformative process to evolve, they say, it must be grounded in long-term consensus building.

Additional information on Connecticut's recovery system can be found at the State web site: www.dmhas.state.ct.us.

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