

Mental Health Association of Essex County

Project Stepping Up

A Transitional Program For Youth Aging-out of the Welfare System

Ages 15-21

Participants:

- PSU targets youth who will be aging out of residential facilities, group homes and foster care placements or youth that as a result of significant problems at home, need to transition into a more therapeutic environment.
- PSU participants, ages 16-21, will be referred through the Essex County Case Assessment Resource Team (CART).
- A PSU referral form will be completed by the CART coordinator, and will be forwarded to PSU along with other clinical and biographical information on the youth.

Services Provided:

PSU is a therapeutic, clinical case management program with the unique ability to provide the following direct care to referred youth.

- Comprehensive Assessment (behavioral or independent living skills)
- Clinical Case Management
- Short-term Supportive Individual
- Family Counseling
- Independent Life Skills Training
- Customized Workshops

- Groups (social skills, anger management, career development or life skills)
- Wraparound Services
- Individual Treatment Planning

Assessment:

- PSU will assess all youth with the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment. The ACLSA is a statistically valid measurement of independent living skills of youth and children ages 8-19.
- A computer-based form of the assessment will be used to measure the capabilities and behaviors typically viewed as important life skills for youth that are between 16-19 years old.
- The ACLSA addresses multiple life skill areas some of which include: career planning and employment, social relationships, money management, health care and safety concerns, decision-making skills, emotional well-being, and self awareness.
- The primary emphasis of the assessment is full mastery of a range of self-sufficiency skills.

Multi-modality:

1. The PSU staff will visit, assess and work with the youth and residential staff to develop a comprehensive service plan, which incorporates all discharge recommendations.
2. A treatment plan will be in place and the youth will be linked to existing community resources prior to the youth's discharge to help him/her transition back into the community.
3. PSU's active case management will act as a home base for the child before, during and after specialized services from outside agencies and programs have been implemented.
4. The PSU staff will actively work to develop a community resource component and will seek out relevant services such as vocational training, GED programs, work-force programs, mental health services, health care services (medical, dental), legal services and life skills training (Steps).

Program Steps:

The youth will be placed in different steps within the program according to the strengths and deficiencies of the youth, determined by the ACLSA. The youth will be referred to community providers as a way of supplementing and accomplishing a particular step. There are a total of six steps and each youth will progress through the steps based on individual need.

The program steps are the following:

Step One: Daily living - Meal planning, grocery shopping, laundry, home cleaning.

Step Two: Money Management - Banking, learning about credit, budgeting and spending, taxes.

Step Three: Housing/Transportation/Community Resources - Finding a place to live, renting, completing a lease application, car insurance, car repairs, where to call for help, registering to vote.

Step Four: Self-Care - Personal hygiene, medication, health care, health insurance, alcohol, drugs and tobacco consumption.

Step Five: Social Skills - Learning about yourself, conflict resolution, anger management, short-term individual and family counseling.

Step Six: Career Exploration/ Employment - Career planning, resume writing, interviewing skills, employment.

Program Objective:

- Our ultimate goal is to measure the progress the youth make toward independent living.
- PSU outcome data will be generated and submitted as part of a nationwide collaborative arrangement created by the Casey Family Foundation.
- Using the ACLSA and data from other researchers and professionals working with youth of similar age and circumstances, the impact of the foster care and residential system to prepare youth for transitioning into independent living will be measured.
- In addition, this measurement will determine the progress the youth has made toward independent living skills while participating in the Project Stepping Up program.

