

Mid-Valley Behavioral Care Network Early Psychosis Project: Executive Summary

Psychosis is common and devastating. Until now, young people and families seeking help for terrifying symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions and disordered speech have lived through repeated trauma and numerous barriers to help. When help becomes available, families confront negative preconceptions and a mental health system which does not aim beyond helping people enter the disability system and stay out of the hospital. New medicines and treatment methods, a thriving self-help movement, and new legal rights create an opportunity to change the negative outcomes associated with psychosis. Mid-Valley Behavioral Care Network (MVBCN) is shifting the assumptions and structure of its services to reflect this optimistic new reality.

Through MVBCN, five Oregon counties have come together to support young people who experience psychosis. The goal is to help them stay on their normal developmental path, with as little disability as possible. Services are based on research-based practice guidelines from the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Center (EPPIC) in Melbourne, Australia. The approach includes: community education; flexible outreach; comprehensive assessment; family partnerships; extensive education and coaching about the illness; a low dose medication protocol; counseling to support self esteem, mastery of symptoms, and progress toward personal goals; and information and support to continue developmental progress. The project has four main objectives:

1. *Identify young people at the earliest possible stage of psychosis*, through systematic education of doctors and others in the community, and making flexible outreach easily available.

2. *Develop and provide supports to minimize long-term disability*, by training and supporting a growing group of experts, developing and disseminating a toolkit and resource materials, modifying policies and procedures, developing appropriate resources, and providing opportunities for families to come together.

3. *Establish this approach in a sustainable fashion within the MVBCN*: modify management and fiscal structures as necessary; build a network of supportive community members; and address regulatory and resource issues as needed.

4. *Disseminate project learning*, through a web site, conferences and articles.

MVBCN intends to create the following outcomes: a) increased community awareness and responsiveness; b) improved individual and family functioning; c) satisfaction of individuals and families with the support they are receiving; d) integration of practice guidelines into ongoing policies and practices throughout the region; e) creation of a strong informal support network for young people with psychosis and their families throughout the region.

The project will integrate new approaches into existing service delivery systems. Grant funds will be used for centralized coordination and supporting services which would not otherwise be funded. An analysis of service needs which would not otherwise be funded will be provided to MVBCN and other decision makers, along with an analysis of the impact on hospitalizations, employment and other outcomes. Existing funding will be restructured to encourage permanent adoption of these methods. An analysis of funding and regulatory issues will be developed and used to advocate for necessary changes. People in recovery, families and local community members will be engaged in an ongoing process of setting direction, providing community education, and supporting families who are new to the experience of psychosis. This growing group of well-informed and invested people who have benefited directly from this approach will be important spokespeople for needed changes.

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