Building Recovery-Oriented Services

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AHCI is a contract agency for the Allegheny County Department of Human Services HealthChoices Program.

Putting Recovery Theory into Practice

In the behavioral health community, there is a general consensus that recovery is the goal that should drive the delivery of treatment and services. By adopting the core principles of recovery, the behavioral health system empowers consumers to be highly active participants in setting the direction of their treatment. To achieve this goal, providers in Allegheny County are seeking ways to make their organizations, and the services they provide, more recovery-focused.

Many provider agencies have incorporated recovery-oriented practices to some extent and with varying degrees of success. For some, despite adapting their mission statement to include a commitment to recovery-oriented services, or emphasizing trainings on recovery for staff, putting recovery into action in their day-to-day operations has proved to be a challenge.

Whether your agency has taken small or large steps in incorporating recovery-oriented practices, or even if you are just considering where to start, it may be beneficial to learn about the experiences other organizations have had in taking on projects to implement changes in their operations and culture. To that end, this newsletter is the first in a series which aims to share the experiences of behavioral health service providers that have successfully implemented projects to imbed recovery in their day-to-day practices. This first edition gives an overview of the experience of one community mental health agency that embarked on an intensive project to incorporate recovery-oriented services and supports into the fabric of their organization.

While this report highlights one organization's experience, it should be emphasized that there are many ways to accomplish this goal. The final page of this newsletter shares a number of approaches and provides resources to help guide organizations in their decisions about how to develop a strategy for adopting recovery-oriented practices. AHCI encourages agencies to further explore these resources and others as they construct their own initiatives to provide recovery-focused services and supports.

> Recovery is a self-determined and holistic journey that people undertake to heal and grow. Recovery is facilitated by relationships and environments that provide hope, empowerment, choices and opportunities that promote people reaching their full potential as individuals and community members.
>
> **Pennsylvania OMHSAS Definition of Recovery**

Turtle Creek Valley CommonGround Pilot

With support from partners Community Care Behavioral Health and the Allegheny County Office of Behavioral Health (OBH), Turtle Creek Valley MH/MR began a pilot program to redesign outpatient services to incorporate shared decision-making in psychiatric medication appointments. The pilot centered on the implementation of a software application called CommonGround, which was developed by Pat Deegan and Associates, LLC. (See box below.)

The primary goal of the pilot was to engage consumers in completing computerized, pre-appointment surveys to facilitate information sharing and collaborative decision making between themselves and their doctor. Another goal was to use this project to establish recovery as a core organizational value at the heart of service delivery at Turtle Creek Valley.

To ensure that the pilot achieved these goals, Turtle Creek Valley and the other project partners found the following to be critical to the success of the project:

- **Communication and Accountability**
Meetings were held between all the project partners every other week for several months. These meetings were used to coordinate the strategic implementation of the pilot and to hold the partners accountable for their discrete tasks.

- **Teamwork and Collaboration**
Working together, the project partners were able to tackle the numerous tasks at hand. For example, Community Care helped Turtle Creek Valley recruit peer staff to work on the project. Turtle Creek Valley renovated office space to accommodate the project, and OBH helped to identify funding. Pat Deegan and Associates trained doctors, clinicians, and non-clinical staff at the outpatient site on the CommonGround software application and philosophy. Collaborative planning assured that the project was well-organized, and project stakeholders acknowledge that these partnerships contributed greatly to a successful start-up.

- **Stakeholder Support and Input**
Turtle Creek Valley worked to engage internal support and feedback from all levels of staff and leadership. "Champions" of the project were ever-present, providing support and motivation to take on the challenges of organizational change. Physicians interested and ready to try this new approach began to incorporate shared decision making into their appointments. Their positive feedback helped create momentum in obtaining buy-in and participation from other doctors.

All of these factors worked together toward the successful implementation of the project.

CommonGround Software

CommonGround is a software application developed by Pat Deegan and Associates. The software is accessed by consumers in a dedicated, peer-run space called the Decision Support Center. At the Turtle Creek Valley pilot site, the Decision Support Center is located adjacent to the outpatient waiting area. Before a psychiatric medication appointment, consumers log into the CommonGround application and complete a survey that asks about current medication use and concerns about medication.

A report based on the survey responses is used by both the consumer and their doctor during the appointment. The report highlights current topics for discussion and guides the shared decision making process.

The CommonGround software also provides consumers with access to a web-based multimedia library, with links to content on recovery, and behavioral and physical health topics, which may be accessed at any time before or after an appointment.

CommonGround in Action at TCV

Now in place for over two years, the CommonGround Decision Support Center has established itself as a part of day-to-day operations and organizational culture at Turtle Creek Valley. There are currently 800 people registered and active in CommonGround, and the software has been used in over 5,100 medication appointments.

Focus groups conducted by Turtle Creek Valley to gather reactions from doctors have found that while there was some initial resistance, most doctors now incorporate the CommonGround report into their appointments. Some doctors noted that they felt they already created shared decisions, and were hesitant to take on the new process which called for them to use the report generated by CommonGround. Despite these reservations, since adopting the practice, some doctors have noted that people who complete the survey tend to share more information and ask more questions in their appointments. Some doctors have reported that people they have worked with for years have opened up to them, asking questions and discussing concerns that they have not broached in the past.

Reactions to the pilot from consumers have generally been positive. Comments gathered from focus groups conducted by Turtle Creek Valley indicate that while some consumers are initially fearful of sharing information or using the computers, most feel that CommonGround works for them. Consumers indicate that completing the survey before the appointment helps free up time for discussion in the appointment. Consumers have also noted that the CommonGround report has helped increase the exchange of ideas between themselves and their doctor during appointments.

For the Turtle Creek Valley organization as a whole, one of the primary lessons from the CommonGround Decision Support Center pilot is the understanding that this approach neither functions as a stand-alone initiative, nor as an add-on tacked to existing processes. Instead, Turtle Creek Valley has embraced the shift in organizational culture that has come with implementing CommonGround, weaving together operations and a recovery-oriented philosophy. Importantly, Turtle Creek Valley reports the emergence of a recovery-focused mentality shared by outpatient center staff, doctors, and administrators, which they attribute to the staff-wide training on CommonGround.

Measuring Impacts

Turtle Creek Valley, Community Care, and Pat Deegan and Associates are currently collecting data related to the pilot of the CommonGround software. Turtle Creek Valley uses data gathered from the software to assess internal utilization. Community Care is seeking to measure the impact the pilot has had on special populations of consumers, medication use, and use of acute services. Research and analysis performed by Pat Deegan and Associates has supported the expansion of CommonGround, which is now being piloted in community outpatient clinics across the country.

What consumers are saying about CommonGround

"Shared decision-making is more honest and open."

—

"I learned [the doctors] are not going to judge us on the report - they are going to help me with a shared decision."

—

"Before CommonGround, I would often call and reschedule my appointments… I didn't want to go. But now I have something to do. Now I show up."

What doctors and staff are saying about CommonGround

"It's about helping to activate clients in their own recovery instead of staff driving the process."

—

"Shared decision making (CommonGround) improves client follow-through with treatment."

—

"CommonGround helps convey that it's not all about the meds… how you use your own skills and strengths [also] have a big impact on how well you do."

Advancing Recovery-Oriented Systems

The pilot of CommonGround at Turtle Creek Valley is just one example of how an organization can put recovery principles into practice. AHCI recommends that organizations take at least one of the following actions to demonstrate commitment to the role of recovery in their operations.

Organizational Change
First steps to guide the adoption of recovery-focused services may include:

- A mission statement with a commitment to use recovery concepts to guide organizational decision-making, and service and support delivery;

- Peer input on service planning and evaluation through presence on managerial boards and committees;

- A Recovery Committee to guide recovery initiatives and activities.

Recovery Toolkits
Agencies should consider implementing the Recovery Toolkits offered free of charge through the Community Care Recovery Institute. These toolkits combine training and materials to enable practitioners to incorporate recovery-oriented enhancements to current treatment practices.

Seeking Partners
Organizations can be more productive in promoting recovery internally when they form collaborative partnerships with other agencies. The Allegheny County Coalition for Recovery and Community Care's Recovery Collaborative provider network, are two groups that seek to bring agencies together with the goal of advancing recovery-oriented services and supports. (See box below.)

Evidence-Based Practices
Organizations may choose to incorporate recovery-oriented evidence-based practices. In this case, the organization should consider using a formal implementation program to help keep project goals, timelines, evaluations, and resources on track. (See KIT, below.)

Allegheny HealthChoices, Inc. (AHCI) is an innovative non-profit agency dedicated to supporting the provision of high-quality mental health and substance abuse treatment.

Our mission is to assure equitable access to quality, cost-effective behavioral health care that promotes positive clinical outcomes, recovery, and resiliency.

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Resources to check out now!

The Recovery to Practice Resource Center, sponsored by the SAMHSA Center for Mental Health Services, provides a searchable database of recovery resources for all types of mental health care practitioners. Visit http://dsgdev2.dsgonline.com/rtp/index.aspx.

The Allegheny County Coalition for Recovery promotes local awareness and use of recovery principals and practices. Visit http://www.coalitionforrecovery.org.

The Recovery Institute provides resources to help agencies and providers put recovery concepts into practice. For information on Recovery Toolkits, the Recovery Collaborative, and more, visit http://www.ccbh.com/providers.

The Illness Management and Recovery KIT provides step-by-step guidance and structure to assist your agency in putting evidence-based recovery concepts into practice. Visit http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/CommunitySupport/toolkits/illness.

The CommonGround approach to treatment is recovery oriented and incorporates shared medication decision-making. Visit http://www.patdeegan.com.