

DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

STRATEGIC PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

Supported Employment Brings Jobs to 108 Clients

Goal 1, Objective 1.3 – Provide community supports for adults transitioning and/or living in the community to prevent out-of-home placements.

Strategy 1.3.2 – Fund three pilot employment sites for individuals with SMI

The process of recovery is different for every person who has a mental illness, but there are several major dimensions that can help support recovery no matter the person. Those are health, home, community, and purpose.

Purpose includes meaningful activities, such as school, volunteering, caretaking, creative endeavors, or employment. To help provide a purpose for people in recovery, the Department of Mental Health has funded four pilot sites through appropriations by the Legislature, with four more to come funded through a federal grant, that are providing Supported Employment for people in recovery from a serious mental illness. The pilot sites currently operating are in Community Mental Health Centers Region 2, Region 7, Region 10, and Region 12.

Over the past fiscal year, those four initial sites made 2,763 business contacts with potential employers, resulting in 165 job placements. As of June 30, 2016, 108 people remained employed across those four pilot sites, with job positions ranging from independent house cleaning and self-employed maintenance workers to cooks, restaurant employees, and mailroom clerks.

One of those people is Arsenio Brown, who has both a hearing impairment and a mental illness. He had been looking for a job for about a year, so he was excited to learn about the program. He began working in October 2015, not long after it started, and said he has been learning ever since.

“I was depressed and bored during the day because I couldn’t find a job, and I didn’t have anything to do,”

Brown said. “But when I received the phone call for an interview I was so happy.”

He started out working as a dishwasher, which he did for several months before his dedication and hard work helped earn him a promotion to a cook. He said he was motivated to quickly learn how to be a good cook, and he knows working has been good for him.

“Since getting my job, I have been able to help the people in my life that depend on me. I have become more dedicated and hardworking,” Brown said.

His dedication and hard work were noticed by others as well. He was named employee of the month earlier this year, a far cry from the discouraged person who joined the Supported Employment program last year.

“Today, he seems like a completely different person,” said Tasia Washington, his Supported Employment Coordinator with Region 10, Weems Mental Health Services. “He is more motivated and has a more positive outlook. It has been amazing watching his transformation over the last few months. This has truly been an example of how employment can serve an important role in someone’s life.”

Brown said it was incredible for him to be named employee of the month.

“It’s incredible news for me, and I’ve proved that deaf people can do things just as well as people with hearing,” he said. “I believe by doing what I am supposed to do and working hard, this has caused me to be successful in my job.”

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CHOICE is Making Housing Affordable

A partnership between the Mississippi Department of Mental Health, Mississippi Home Corporation, the Division of Medicaid, and the state's 14 regional Community Mental Health Centers is helping to make housing affordable for people living with a mental illness.

In Fiscal Year 2016, the Mississippi Legislature appropriated funding to establish this partnership, now

known as CHOICE – Creative Housing Options in Communities for Everyone. The program was developed over the fiscal year, and as Fiscal Year 2017 begins, 48 people have been housed in communities of their own choice so far. While CHOICE provides the assistance that makes the housing affordable, local Community Mental Health Centers provide the appropriate services, all based on the needs of the individual. It is currently being piloted in Regions 3, 4, 8, 12, and 14.

“Our role at DMH is to make sure people are supported and successful in their homes,” said Veronica Vaughn, Director of the Office of Consumer Support/Community Living. “Everyone who is referred to CHOICE uses the same referral form used by SPOTT in our office, which helps us ID the services that are needed.”

SPOTT is another partnership of state agencies and other providers that works to connect each person to all of the specialized services they may need. Using the same referral form helps guarantee that CHOICE is not only getting people placed in the communities they prefer, but close to the services they need.

“Everyone is given a pre-screener, and that’s how this all starts,” Vaughn said. “We meet with them, talk about where they want to live, and what services are needed. For instance, if they need a PACT team, that’s the most

intensive service offered in the community, so we need to make sure they’re able to get that.”

Referrals come through DMH or a Community Mental Health Center, and Mississippi Home Corporation provides

a housing voucher that helps individuals pay their rent. The number one priority is to provide assistance to people who are

being discharged from a DMH program after a treatment period of at least 90 days.

Other priorities include people who have had multiple hospital visits in the past year, who were arrested due to conduct associated with their mental illness, or who have had multiple periods of homelessness in the past three years.

DMH has also partnered with Muteh, inc. – Mississippians United to End Homelessness – to track data related to homelessness and the effects of programs working to prevent homelessness. The data collection and reporting are vital in evaluating practices in the community and gaps that may exist in the system. Besides its use in CHOICE, this data can also be used in an ongoing federal grant, the Coalition to Benefit Homeless Individuals. The research and the data gained can aid in developing blueprints as the state continues to build its capacity for community-based services and supports.

“There are people coming out of our hospitals, and we are linking them to services in the community,” Vaughn said. “This is all very person-centered. There is not one decision made that is without the individual’s input.

“This is going to be a big project that will be taking place over several years.”

Goal 1, Objective 1.5 – Provide community supports for people transitioning to the community to allow adults with serious mental illness access to appropriate and affordable housing.

