

Focus Group 2
Family Members
Summary of Salient Points

A common theme that ran through most of the comments was that no one really knew what they were dealing with when their family member got sick. If they were in college often it was diagnosed as an adjustment disorder and treated by a counselor of some type. Many said the first real help for them came when they attended the NAMI Family-to-Family course. Often the diagnosis took several years and treatment was trial and error until the right mix of medications was found.

It was noted that people with a mental illness need an advocate. If their family is not involved an advocate is a necessity. Most people in the focus group were the advocates for their family member. Most family members in the group received care through the Health Department. They felt that the caseworkers should be out visiting clients rather than meeting them in the caseworker's office.

Housing is one of the biggest problems for people with a mental illness and they need an array of different housing options but housing should be stable and

permanent until the individual with a mental illness wants to move on. A story was related about a group home in Westmont. All residents were very independent and only needed a visit from a case worker once or twice a month. The residents had been living together for over ten years and for some reason the Health Department decided to sell the home and break up this successful living arrangement. One person went to a nursing home; one person went to live with his father and the other two they didn't know what happened to them. The people in this home were safe and secure and living well and the program was a success.

A big problem currently at the Health Department was the lack of psychiatrists. People are seeing the doctors every 3 to 4 months and sometimes the appointments are canceled. This is a big concern. Also there were complaints about the Health Department not following up on other medical concerns. If it entailed transportation to doctors sometimes this fell through the cracks.

Another problem that was mentioned was the linkage from hospitals to the community services.

Transportation was also cited as a problem. If a client lived in Health Department housing the HD would transport them to their jobs. In the last year they decided to no longer do this. The HD recommended taking a cab. At some of the housing residents are not allowed to have a car and the HD has vans that belong to the housing. Most people in the focus group thought that jobs were key to recovery and that they needed support in maintaining the jobs.

Generally everyone agreed that they needed a diagnosis so they knew what they were dealing with and how best to treat it.

All agreed that the mental health provider should use evidenced based practices. Many felt as if the Health Department had not changed the way they did things for the last 15 years. In the last 15 years evidenced based practices have been developed but the Health Department wanted to continue doing what they always had done. One person felt that the health department should turn over the housing to another provider because they thought that the HD did not do a very good job and they were very punitive.

People need a safe and secure environment and they need a job. The evidenced based supportive employment is well researched and has been proven effective in helping people recover from a mental illness.

An integrated system of care is needed and a continuum of care is needed.

Also it was noted that the state has taken a path away from caring for the most seriously ill people. There used to be money in the budget to cover people who were not on Medicaid but now there is only money for 5 hours of treatment a year. Often the sickest do not have Medicaid because they do not have documentation and they are too sick to organize what they need to obtain Medicaid.

If the system were integrated and working well an advocate or systems navigator would not be necessary. Since the system is fragmented it is difficult to navigate and help is needed.