ACT Expands its Role in New York State!

Stacey Hale, LMSW, Director of Care Coordination, NYSOMH; Jonathan Robinson, LCSW, Mental Health Program Specialist Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and Care Coordination, NYSOMH

From left to right: Stacey Hale; Kelly Jobin, Mental Health Program Specialist; & Jonathan Robinson

The New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) is committed to the development of twenty new Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams that will be launched throughout New York State. ACT is an evidence-based model with strong roots in recovery and person-centered approaches. Its multifaceted team approach aimed at guiding individuals through recovery by way of eliciting and activating their values, interests and goals has shown positive outcomes.

While ACT teams have been operating in New York State and the country for many years, the approach continues to evolve, informed by new evidence, and adapting to changes including within our healthcare system and economy. ACT operates with a strong focus on the recovery-based tenet that, if provided with or guided toward the information, resources, tools and support tailored to their specific goals and needs; individuals diagnosed with serious mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorders will be in a significantly better position to thrive and lead independent lives. ACT is a service that OMH has endorsed as particularly meaningful and effective. As stated in the Request for Proposal (RFP) of the New York City (NYC) shelter ACT teams, “The expansion of ACT represents a commitment by the State Office of Mental Health to increase access to an evidence-based practice to individuals with SMI.”
Peer specialists have historically served on ACT teams, and there is a renewed effort to ensure ACT teams employ peers due to their significant contribution in all areas, including engagement, wellness, benefits and symptom management.

The RFP for the 10 NYC ACT shelter teams was posted and has ended and the 10 teams have been awarded to seven providers. A unique component to the most recently developing 10 ACT teams in NYC is that they will be formally connected with mental health homeless shelters. Efforts are currently underway by the Office of Mental Health, ACT Institute and Department of Homeless Services to ensure that the agencies who have been awarded these contracts have access to the information, training and resources necessary for the successful start-up and continuing operation of these teams. The shelter ACT teams represent an ongoing effort to identify milieus and scenarios best suited for such evidence-based supports, with a clear focus on the concept of meeting people where they are. Engaging recipients in shelter settings facilitates inclusion and cooperation of staff, community contacts, family, friends and others who recipients interface with every day. This setting also puts the concepts of housing and community at the forefront of treatment.

The RFP for one Long Island team and the RFP for four NYC teams have been posted. Long Island proposals were due 6/15/17 and are in review. The NYC proposals were due 7/18/17. The remainder of the teams will be procured through the counties. There will be two teams in Hudson River, one team in Central New York, and two teams in Western NY.

The Office of Mental Health has the advantage of a partnership with the ACT Institute, whose staff have been engaging with and training ACT teams since 2003. Their dedication and expertise is of paramount importance, and their training and consultation provides the mechanism for imparting to teams the concepts, approaches and methods crucial for the optimum functioning of an ACT team. The ACT Institute has been working on new training initiatives, including role specific trainings. Their role is of particular importance in the effort to initiate new ACT teams. The ACT Institute will also be leading a Learning Collaborative for the new teams once the teams are up and running.

Over the next year, the mission and expectation is of the addition of ACT teams in Long Island and upstate New York, the further development of the newest ACT teams in New York City, and the ongoing support for ACT teams across the New York State.

For more information about the ACT in New York State, please contact Stacey Hale: stacey.hale@omh.ny.gov