

Focus on Housing

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**Congratulations to
Comprehensive
Behavioral Health
Care and North
Jersey Friendship
House on their
45th and 50th
Anniversaries!**

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FAMILYConnections Provides Housing and Much More through its HomeSafe Program



HomeSafe Staff pictured left to right: Quadira Shorter, Parent Advocate; Alexandria Riley, LPC, Clinical Coordinator; and Raymonde Hilaire, Housing Case Manager

After having endured domestic violence; alcoholism, anxiety and depression; and used cutting as a coping mechanism, a single mother stayed in a shelter with eight of her nine children (one is grown and on her own) where the crowded environment exacerbated the woman's health conditions and the children exhibited anger and aggressiveness. Today, the woman and her children have their own home; the mother is no longer cutting or drinking, and is feeling a lot less stressed and highly motivated to improve herself; and the children are no longer aggressive, thanks to FAMILYConnections' HomeSafe program.

"The basic need and right for people to have access to housing is so powerful and so simple at the same time. No matter what the barrier is to housing – mental illness, substance use, trauma, poverty – this program changes families' lives," said Krista Zuccheri, LPC, Director of Programs at FAMILYConnections.

HomeSafe is a pilot program to help 10 families in Essex County with co-occurring mental health diagnoses and substance use disorders, in which children are at risk of being placed in foster care or have been placed in foster care as a result of homelessness or housing instability, and have a case plan for reunification. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) partnered with the Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to be able to provide housing subsidies for identified families, and DCF provided funding for in-home clinical, case management, and family support services. FAMILYConnections received funding for the program in July 2014, following a competitive bidding process.

The pilot is based on a model called *Keeping Families Together* that was started in 2007 by the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) in New York City. The model combines housing assistance with comprehensive, evidence-based, trauma-informed therapeutic and concrete supports. "It focuses on the importance of supportive housing as an intervention and providing wraparound services to keep families safely unified or to enable them to reunify. The lack of stable housing is usually a barrier to keeping families together," Zuccheri explained.

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SERV Collaborates with Consumers to

SERV – Social, Educational, Residential, Vocational – have been the areas of focus and consumers’ success throughout the 40 years since SERV Behavioral Health System, Inc. was founded. In 1974, former Middlesex County attorney Mark W. Fox and family members of adults with mental illness “showed the state that they could provide better services in the home for people, rather than in an institution, and do it for a quarter of the cost,” Ida Doolan, SERV’s Director of Communications, told *The Times of Trenton* (November 22, 2014). With a \$156,000 grant awarded from the state, the agency was launched with a group home for eight individuals in Middlesex County and has grown consistently and substantially since then.

Currently, SERV has nearly 800 employees and serves approximately 1,200 individuals each year through various programs in Burlington, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset and Union Counties. SERV Centers of New Jersey includes residential, partial care and outpatient services for adults with serious mental illnesses; and SERV Achievement Centers includes group homes,

vocational training programs, crisis intervention and in-home services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. The organization also includes SERV Properties and Management, which specializes in the development and management of housing for special populations; Advanced Health Management, Inc., which provides facilities management services and general human resources outsourcing; and Creative Intervention for Mental Health and Chemical Dependency, which provides evaluation and treatment for psychiatric and chemical dependency problems. The SERV Foundation raises funds to support special programs for consumers, such as the annual Recovery NJ Conference in the fall for consumers and their family members, and the Scholarship Fund for SERV consumers who would like to continue their education but have little means to do so. The Foundation’s major fundraiser is the Volley For SERV Tennis Tournament, now in its 25th year and held June 15th each year.

Gary van Nostrand served on the agency’s Board of Trustees for six years prior to becoming the President and CEO in 1998. “It just happened that I got into administration. I tried to stay working with clients until 1984 when I couldn’t do it anymore. But, I still use my clinical background helping staff to work out issues with residents,” he said. Van Nostrand’s career began as a clinical neuropsychologist and he was the first to complete a residency in this specialty at the Mayo Clinic. Following this work experience, he worked in substance use treatment in Iowa. In 1984, he moved to New Jersey to become Vice President of the Medical Center at Princeton where he was responsible for Princeton House and various other departments in the hospital.



Gary Van Nostrand,
President and CEO of
SERV Behavioral Health
System, Inc.



Carl C., a Middlesex County resident since 2002, painted “Clipper” when SERV announced an art contest for its 2015 calendar. Carl, whose painting was selected for the cover of the calendar, said that entering the contest for the first time and winning has re-ignited an interest he has not explored since he was a young man taking art classes. When he finished his artwork, he rediscovered how painting helps him to “grow spiritually, emotionally and mentally.”

Build their Wellness and Independence



One of SERV Achievement Centers' newest group homes opened in Hunterdon County in July 2014, SERV, Inc. opened two new group homes. To mark the occasion, local legislators and neighbors were invited to Open Houses where they met the staff who provide residents consumers with a well-structured living environment and teach them the skills necessary for living and working successfully in the community.

Under his leadership and his predecessors' at SERV, the agency's most significant growth has taken place in both mental health and intellectual/developmental disability services, primarily in residential services. "We developed relationships with municipalities and received COAH [Council On Affordable Housing] funding for housing. We've had to deal with NIMBY ["Not in My Backyard"] off and on, so we held Open Houses right away, before clients moved in, to have the neighbors meet the staff. The Zoning Board can't stop it like they could years ago, but the attitude still needs work," van Nostrand said.

A few years ago, SERV launched programs for individuals who have both a mental illness and an intellectual or developmental disability. "We took patients out of long-term hospitalization and brought them into SERV residential programs. We worked with them for a long time while they were still in the hospitals to help them make the transition. Some have done very well. One is employed," said Dr. Jay Cohen, a psychiatrist who has worked part-time for SERV for more than 31 years. "The biggest success is that most of these individuals have not gone back to the hospital, not even for short visits. And they're social to some degree. It's hard

after spending 30 years in a hospital and because of prejudice. They use the drop-in centers and participate in the day program. It also saves the state a lot of money."

Last year, SERV opened four new homes under the SERV Achievement Centers umbrella, which allowed the agency to expand into Somerset and Hunterdon Counties. The agency also expanded vocational services at its Progressive Achievement Centers in Ewing and Cranford for adults with intellectual impairments. Enrollment at these centers has increased by 25 percent during the past fiscal year, van Nostrand said.

"Other positive changes at SERV have been integration of more clinical interventions; partnering with St. Joseph's Medical Center since 2013 to serve patients who present in the emergency department; and becoming involved with Crisis Intervention Training for the police, fire department, and other community workers," said Pauline Simms, MS, LSW, Director of SERV Centers, Northern Region.

[SERV's] recovery-oriented services had a positive impact on rates of overnight hospitalization [30 percent reduction], residents' ability to function in the community and the working alliance between direct care providers and residents.

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SERV Collaborates with Consumers to

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This group home in Somerset County opened in July 2014.

Recovery Model: Biggest Change with Tremendous Benefits

According to van Nostrand, the biggest change implemented at SERV was the change to the Recovery Model philosophy, which is based on the belief that individuals with mental illness can recover and that this is best accomplished when they direct their own care and decide the paths of their own lives. In fact, the agency also had consumers involved on a committee in planning for this transformation, which started in 2005. "We had a different transition to the recovery model in each setting: residential programs, a traditional outpatient community mental health center, day programs and a private psychiatric practice," van Nostrand said. "It was a challenge for the employees, many of whom are social workers and were trained to direct consumers' care. Both staff and consumers had to be trained on goal setting."

"The consumers feel they are much more a part of their care and have more say on where they want to go in their lives. And the employees, especially social workers, recognize it is easier to work with clients when you join with them, as opposed to directing them," van Nostrand said

In addition to goal setting, the model includes Wellness and Recovery Action Plans and Illness Management and Recovery techniques; and changing staff attitudes from a focus on compliance to collaboration, according to Linda Gochfeld, MD, DFAPA, Medical Director. She explained that the recovery model focuses on respect for the consumers and working towards their ability to

lead meaningful lives in their communities, and that this is achieved by addressing all biological, psychological, social and vocational needs.

The transformation to the recovery model initially involved 490 employees and 627 consumers. It was implemented in 2005 and the impact was studied from 2006 to 2009. In fact, this was the first study to measure the results of this model. The study, which was published in the prestigious *Psychological Services* journal of the American Psychological Association in December 2013, found that "recovery-oriented services had a positive impact on rates of overnight hospitalization, residents' ability to function in the community, some professional skills of employees, and the working alliance between direct care providers and residents." Hospital stays, whether for mental health or other reasons, among consumers in all five counties were reduced by 30 percent, compared to before the recovery model was implemented.

They become more independent and able to be in the community. They perform jobs in the day programs and some succeed enough to get paid. And many have finished high school.

– Doris Roper,
Family Care Provider

Additional benefits that Dr. Gochfeld noted were optimism among the employees and more choices and community activities for the clients.

Build their Wellness and Independence

SERV was recognized for this successful transformation in 2007 by the New Jersey Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association.

Moving Up: An Inspiring Success Story

When Phyllis M., who has bipolar disorder and a substance use disorder, attended a partial day program at Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton, in 2007, a counselor recommended SERV to her and she then began living at one of SERV's group homes and still continued to attend the partial care program every day for four years. She was in the group home for one year and then advanced to independent living at SERV. Currently, she is in SERV's supportive housing program and employed as a school bus driver. Phyllis will be celebrating eight years of sobriety this coming July.

"In the group home, all residents have to do the same thing. We had to attend a substance use treatment group six days a week. Once I left the group home, I got involved with NA," [Narcotics Anonymous], Phyllis said, adding that she continues to participate in NA meetings, as well as NA's Group Service monthly meetings, and shares information with fellow NA members and serves as her NA home group's treasurer.

"I also have diabetes and with the help of SERV's suggestions, I lost 70 pounds within a year. I'm no longer insulin dependent. My future started to look brighter. Then, I also got off some antidepressant medications,



Doris and Tommie Roper, Family Care Providers, have a long history of enabling many individuals to overcome IDD related challenges.

which caused weight gain. I'm now very active in my church and I have a good relationship with the God of my understanding. I now can look in the mirror and love the person I see. I have gained positive and healthy relationships, and I practice spiritual principles in my religion and relationships. SERV was my advocate for

// I have now learned how to advocate for myself, but I'm very grateful that SERV still helps and directs me when needed. //

- Phyllis M., Resident

so many years. I have now learned how to advocate for myself, but I'm very grateful that SERV still helps and directs me when needed. I used to be very fearful of addressing my problems, but no more. I now have a spirit of courage. I would recommend SERV to anyone. I decided to let SERV make choices for me because of my low self-esteem and low self-worth because all of the choices I made were bad ones. Since entering SERV, I have made progress over the past eight years. Honestly, I have never taken a step backwards since," Phyllis said.

When asked what message she would like to share with others who have a mental illness or substance use disorder, Phyllis said, "Get help. If not, your life is never going to change. I don't want anyone to feel the way I did or to miss out on how good I'm feeling about life today. People need to know that we do not have a moral deficiency. It's a disease, a chemical imbalance. We are not responsible for our disease, but please realize that we are responsible for our recovery."

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Greatest Challenges Overcome in the DD Community

Serving the intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) community had been a small part of SERV when van Nostrand joined the agency. Since then, this service area has grown substantially.

In 1996, SERV acquired the Center for Innovative Family Achievements (CIFA), which has private group homes, to further SERV's mission of service to those with IDD's. In 2008, the name was changed to SERV Achievement Centers.

Two members of the original CIFA team are Doris and Tommie Roper, who started in the field in the 1970s in Arkansas. They received training at a mental health agency to work with individuals with developmental disabilities, where they also taught the family therapeutic model of foster care. In their own home, they had brought in teens with developmental disabilities and other challenges, several of whom still live with them today. The Ropers brought their extended family and their expertise to New Jersey, where they opened a group home for young women before joining CIFA.

"SERV has provided more programs for the developmentally challenged individuals to address their needs over the years," Doris said.

"We enjoy working together as a team. They are available to provide information and support, to assist us in handling challenging situations," Tommie added.

"We have taken some of the most challenging individuals who are having a difficult time adjusting to the community and following rules. We teach them how to go back home and have visitations with their parents without [difficult] behaviors. They can now go to restaurants and order from menus. That's a powerful success," Tommie said.

"We teach the consumers various social and daily living skills to use during difficult and challenging times. As a result, some become more independent and are able to function in the community. That's a tremendous turnaround. They are also able to participate in different community activities," Doris added.

Individuals participate in day programs. They perform jobs in these programs and some succeed enough to get paid. In addition, many have finished high school.

"Without the support of the SERV group, we wouldn't be able to do this," the Ropers stated.

Successes Seen Every Day



Allan Boyer

"We see success stories all the time. Someone comes to SERV very ill after being in a hospital for 10 or 20 years, then he moves to lower levels of care and then to his own apartment."

"I never cease to be amazed about the talents our consumers have. I was recently on a site visit at a consumer's apartment. The consumer built some of the furniture; it's beautiful. We're giving them the resources to hone their talents. There are successes we see every day, that we can brag about every day. Family reunification is another one. It's tremendous." – Allan Boyer, Chief Operating Officer of SERV Centers of New Jersey.

"We see people who are really sick become able to function better. One person was in the hospital for almost 40 years and then lived in a group home. Another person who has a mental illness and developmental disability injured herself, had a long-term hospitalization and was not social. Now, she is out of the hospital, not hurting herself and is being tutored. A man who was limited with performing activities of daily living got a maintenance job, at first took the bus to work with staff and now does it on his own, and he gets himself up each morning."



Dr. Jay Cohen

– Dr. Jay Cohen

Build their Wellness and Independence



Pauline Simms

Health Association.” – Pauline Simms

SERV offers a scholarship fund that allows our consumers’ the opportunity to further their education by obtaining their degree or pursue a vocation or vocational school...It is always gratifying when we see a consumer graduate with a degree, and we have seen many of those. One consumer who graduated from SERV obtained employment at the Mental

what they think will be of help to consumers. There’s a real give and take in terms of communication both vertically and horizontally.” – *Allan Boyer*.

“SERV has a culture of two-way communication in which feedback and suggestions are always welcome. Staff is included in changes and is encouraged to find the best way to accomplish their job. Consumers and improving services is our top priority. Consumers are involved in policymaking decisions; they are on our Continuous Quarterly Policy and Improvement Committee and attend Recovery Meetings. We work in a trusting environment where good examples are set. “There is genuine care for the consumers starting with the CEO who demonstrates value, respect and a clear passion for the company.” – *Pauline Simms*

What Makes SERV a Great Place to Work

“I enjoy the flexibility of the community-based environment and the greater opportunities to network and make a difference. There is also great flexibility and tremendous autonomy at SERV, allowing people the ability to do what they’re interested in and pursue

“I’ve known every SERV director and they all have respectfulness for the company, especially Gary, his respect for the people. There is no hidden agenda; he’s very open. I will definitely be here until I retire.”
– *Dr. Jay Cohen*

Highlight Your Staff and Agencies in NJAMHAA News

Share your organization’s news -- such as new grants, expanded programs and awards received - and individual staff members and success stories in *NJAMHAA News*. It’s great for networking with other NJAMHAA members, which could lead to meaningful and business-strengthening partnerships. In addition, it contributes to educating our elected and appointed officials about the value of the behavioral healthcare system. Contact Shauna Moses, Managing Editor, at 609-838-5488, ext. 204, or send your news to Shauna at smoses@njamhaa.org. Thank you!

**Clients’ Success Stories Are also of Great Interest
and Equally Valuable in our Advocacy!**