

## Community Support Services (CSS)

### Description

*The mission of Community Support Services (CSS) is to increase accessibility to quality, affordable housing in Essex and Morris counties for adults (18+) diagnosed with a serious and persistent mental illness, and to provide comprehensive, high-quality mental health services.*

*The goal of CSS is to assist individuals who are currently hospitalized, homeless, or living in substandard housing in gaining access to adequate, affordable housing. Since its inception in 2006, CSS has been able to identify and develop housing opportunities—such as two residences in Bloomfield, one in Nutley, and one in Montclair—along with creating relationships with landlords in the community to secure lease-based housing for our consumers. CSS also offers flexible support services that are based on wellness and recovery principles.*

*CSS works collaboratively to build on each individual's capacities, resiliencies, and talents to develop an individualized, strengths-based rehabilitation plan. This plan promotes successful reintegration into the community while supporting individuals in resuming or engaging in new life roles (e.g., tenant, partner, caregiver, friend, student, and employee). It is the belief of the program that, with support and access to a safe, affordable living environment, individuals in recovery will be able to live in the community and achieve a higher quality of life.*

### Personnel

The CSS quality services are provided by 1 Director, 2 Recovery Coordinators, 4 Clinical Coordinators, 8 Senior Recovery Counselors, 15 Recovery Counselors, 2 Housing Specialists, 2 Full-Time Nurses, and 1 Administrative Assistant/Billing Clerk. Staff are culturally diverse and representative of the persons served. CSS has 4 staff fluent in Creole, 1 fluent in French, 2 fluent in Spanish.

CSS provides flexible services tailored to each individual's needs. The program has consistently gone above and beyond typical supportive housing services and has demonstrated creativity in our services and referrals. CSS staff are available for support and crisis intervention 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

A system has been developed to ensure prompt access to the appropriate on-call personnel, identifying a responsible party as the chief point of contact for on-call coverage. Our ability to respond to individuals around the clock has prevented numerous psychiatric hospitalizations and emergency room visits.

### Caseload

Community Support Services has successfully placed over 304 individuals diagnosed with a serious and persistent mental illness from a wide variety of referral sources, such as Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital, Essex County Hospital Center, community-based providers, higher level of care/service

organizations, self-referrals and shelters due to homelessness. Additionally, CSS provided supportive services to 82 individuals who have their own residence but needed additional care to ensure their stability in the community.

## Demographics

As of June 30, 2025, the active caseload for Community Support Services was 316. On this date, there were 149 males (47%), 124 females (39%), 2 transgender male to female (0.9%), and 2 transgender female to male (0.6%). The self-reported ethnicities of the consumers enrolled with CSS are as follows: 23 Hispanic/Latino (7%); 282 non-Hispanic/Latino (89%), and 11 individuals who did not want to disclose (3%). The self-reported races of the consumers enrolled with CSS are as follows: 7 Asian (2%); 2 Black or African-American & White (0.6%); 140 Black or African-American (44%), 3 multi-racial (0.9%); 3 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (0.9%); 7 Other (2%); 143 White (45%); 15 who did not want to disclose (5%).

CSS works with consumers throughout Essex and Morris counties. Remaining cognizant of the importance of wellness and recovery, CSS consumers primarily live-in residences that are convenient to mass transportation, employment opportunities, social service organizations and natural community supports.

## Performance Outcomes

Community Support Services (CSS) participates in the agency-wide Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) which conducts monthly meetings and collects data on utilization of services, quality assessment, quantitative monitoring, incident review and risk management, satisfaction surveys and measured outcomes of performance.

CSS performance indicators measure the rate of recidivism to the County/State hospitals and recidivism rate to the Short-Term Care Facilities on a monthly basis. During this fiscal year, the overall recidivism rate to the County/State hospitals was 0.3% and the recidivism rate for Short-Term Care Facilities was 3%. Both of these rates of recidivism are below the threshold of twenty percent (20%) for a population who, traditionally, relies heavily on acute care services.

CSS performance indicators also measure the linkage to employment which includes full-time work, part-time work, volunteer work and educational programs. This performance indicator is monitored quarterly. During this past fiscal year, CSS was able to assist 7% of our consumers to secure and/or maintain involvement with employment, vocational programs or schools.

Health and Wellness continues to be one of the primary areas of focus within the CSS program. 100% of individuals participating in CSS were educated on "Summer Heat and Sun Risks for Antipsychotic Medication Users." The CSS staff provide ongoing medication education and support. This includes identification and management of side-effects.

## Consumer Satisfaction Surveys

MHA is continuously refining services based on consumer input, which is received through various methods, including the annual Consumer Satisfaction Survey. This year, ninety-nine individuals served completed the surveys. The overall satisfaction rate was 90%, with 95% of respondents feeling they can freely voice their issues or concerns. Additionally, 93% indicated that they felt they were treated with dignity and respect, that staff encourage individuals to make their own decisions, that they actively participate in their rehabilitation plan, and that staff are respectful of their cultural backgrounds.

## Program Highlights

This year CSS began gifting Welcome Baskets to consumers who were newly housed. The baskets included a Welcome Mat, Keychain, 1 Home Décor item, Homemade Soup and a handwritten card from the CSS team. A photograph was taken and given to the consumer as a keepsake to commemorate the momentous occasion of securing permanent housing.

CSS Morris is in its second year as a Housing Authority managing the Safe Haven Permanent Supportive Housing project. This program provides rental subsidies to 12 consumers and offers case management services as well. Seven of the twelve consumers have been long-standing CSS consumers and are happy to have their Housing Authority managed by MHA as well.

CSS began working with four individuals previously enrolled in the NJ Mentor program who were at risk of homelessness. CSS was able to successfully house one consumer in permanent housing. Additionally, CSS transitioned one consumer to a Boarding home, where he is thriving, socializing, and receiving the additional support needed. CSS also secured two subsidies through DMHAS to help the consumers remain housed in their current placements, where they have resided for over 10 years and have established a strong connection to the Host families caring for them. CSS continues to provide case management to all 4 individuals.

CSS was able to secure an additional 3 permanent supportive housing vouchers through its partnership with CSPNJ due to stellar performance reviews that resulted in increased grant funding awarded to the program.

The CoC/HUD conducted a site visit to review two CSS HUD funded programs. MHA's CSS program was recognized for having complete, well-organized charts and consumer records. CSS was also commended for their excellent work with their Montclair owned property, Orange Rd. Consumers were interviewed by the CoC representative and reported outstanding work both as the service provider and landlord.

CSS provided air conditioning units to all consumers in need during the summer months to ensure their health and safety in the home while educating the importance of Summer Sun and Heat Risk. During winter months, CSS provided winter coats, hats, socks, and gloves to all consumers in need.

CSS participated in the Annual Consumer picnic where consumers are transported to a park for a fun filled day of socialization, activities and food. CSS also held various event activities celebrating holidays such

has Halloween and December festivities, offering consumers a chance to engage in themed games, crafts, and celebrations that foster community and enjoyment.

CSS continued to own and operate two single-family homes in Bloomfield, a 6-unit apartment building in Nutley, and two 6-unit buildings in Montclair. These properties provide permanent supportive housing to a total of 25 individuals diagnosed with severe and persistent mental illness. CSS ensured that the buildings' exterior and interior met or exceeded the quality of the housing in the neighborhood. CSS retained professional landscaping services and contractors who specialize in construction, heating, air conditioning, electric, plumbing and snow plowing. Tenants were encouraged to fully participate in decision making in terms of physical plan and environment of care. All tenants were given the rights and responsibilities afforded as a tenant in a tenant/landlord relationship. This past year, one of our Bloomfield Properties, Project 99, was newly renovated and has identified 2 chronically homeless individuals to be housed.

CSS continued to develop strong relationships with landlords and other service providers throughout Essex and Morris counties in order to better meet the needs of the individuals served. CSS has a Housing Specialist in each county to build on landlord networking and establish supportive positive relationships with them to keep consumers housed and prevent eviction.

CSS participates in the Annual Consumer Achievement Awards. This year's award recipient was an individual who achieved her goal of finishing college, starting her Master's Degree in Fine Arts, establishing her on-line business, and moving to an apartment in a safer environment. She is also a strong advocate for other individuals with mental illness and spoke directly with members of DMHAS to advocate for an increase in the FMR enabling consumers to find housing in a competitive housing market.

CSS goes above and beyond when assisting consumers with special requests, while out of the ordinary represents important milestones in their Recovery. For example, CSS staff were asked to accompany a consumer to his "Swearing-In" ceremony when he became a US Citizen as he felt this goal could not have been reached without his case manager. Another consumer asked his case manager to accompany him to the cemetery where his wife was buried so that he could visit her as he did not feel comfortable asking anyone else.

## **Advocacy Activities**

CSS staff work closely with each individual to develop self-advocacy skills and to encourage involvement in both program-level and systems-level advocacy. These skills are used to procure on-going and necessary services and supports. Staff provided education on direct skills and linked individuals to trainings and activities related to the consumer movement (Self-Help Centers, Consumer Advocacy Partnership). Individuals were also encouraged to participate in self-help groups, NAMI-NJ, and other MHANJ advocacy initiatives.

In addition, CSS staff continued to participate in the following Committees and Meetings:

- Comprehensive Emergency Assistance System (CEAS)

- Community Assistance Services (CAS)
- Essex and Morris County Residential Meeting (which is a sub-committee to the System Review Committee (SRC))
- Community Assessment Team (CAT)
- Landlord Support Program (LSP)
- Morris County Data Quality Committee
- Supportive Housing Association (SHA)
- Morris County Provider Resource Committee (MCPRC)
- CSS Monthly Meeting by DMHAS

## **FY 2026 Goals**

CSS aims to achieve a 100% lease-up rate for all tenants residing in MHA owned properties and to fill all vacant beds promptly in both Essex and Morris counties. The program also seeks to increase weekly Medicaid billing in preparation for the upcoming transition for a fee-for-service model. Additionally, all staff will receive training in Motivational Interviewing to enhance services engagement and will be equipped with the case management skills necessary to deliver high quality services to the individuals served.