

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, 7 Senior Recovery Counselors, 14.5 Recovery Counselors, 2 Housing Specialists, and 2 Full-Time Nurses. CSS has 1 staff fluent in Creole, 2 fluent in French, and 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 its 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 331 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 71 individuals who have their own residence but needed additional care to ensure their stability in the community.

Demographics

As of June 30, 2026, the active caseload for Community Support Services was 300. On this date, there were 53.5% male, 45% female, and 1.5% transgender. The self-reported ethnicities of the consumers enrolled with CSS are as follows: 9% Hispanic/Latino; 89% non-Hispanic/Latino, and 2% individuals who did not want to disclose. The self-reported races of the consumers enrolled with CSS are as follows: 2% Asian; 1% Black or African-American & White; 45% Black or African-American, 1% multi-racial; 1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; 3% Other; 45% White; 2% who did not want to disclose.

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% 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 13% 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, one hundred ten (110) individuals served completed the surveys. The overall satisfaction rate was 94%, with 94% of respondents feeling they can freely voice their issues or concerns. Additionally, 96% 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, MHA participated in a research study with NYU on Overdose Prevention in Permanent Supportive Housing. Both Housing Specialists from the CSS program participated and were able to share knowledge and tools with the rest of the program. In addition, a consumer from the agency-owned Drill apartments participated in the study and reported feeling proud to be part of something that could potentially save lives.

As a result of this successful study, MHA was invited to participate in the Permanent Supportive Housing Overdose Prevention+ (POP+) Project. This project is a collaboration with the Committee of Supportive Housing (CSH), the National Harm Reduction Coalition, Rutgers University, and NYU Grossman School of Medicine to inform best practices in supportive housing settings that will help providers reduce the risk of overdose and death related to opioid use, and to improve overall health outcomes for supportive

housing residents. We are very excited to build off the success of our first POP Study and to continue to impact and support the field.

This year, CSS staff participated in Narcan Training conducted by Prevention is Key and are all certified to administer Narcan in the event of a potential overdose. Additionally, all staff received training in Motivational Interviewing to enhance service engagement and provide staff with the case management skills necessary to deliver high quality services to the individuals served.

CSS Morris is in its third 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 are enrolled in the CSS program and are happy to have their Housing Authority managed by MHA as well. During the past year, the Safe Haven program underwent a Site Monitoring audit which resulted in an overall score of 93%, as well as a perfect score for Program Evaluation and Data Quality. During the past year, the Safe Haven program successfully “graduated” one of its consumers, who completed Nursing school, secured full time employment and is able to maintain her apartment without the use of a rental subsidy. The project is at full capacity with 2 recent admissions, both of whom had a history of chronic homelessness and now have a place to call home.

CSS continues 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 retains professional landscaping services and contractors who specialize in construction, heating, air conditioning, electric, plumbing, and snow plowing. During this year’s CARF review, the Drill apartments in Montclair were visited by the CARF reviewer who noted the exceptional condition and upkeep of the property. Several consumers were interviewed by CARF who reported that it was evident that the residents were provided wrap-around services specific to their needs which allowed them to feel supported and well cared for in a place that felt like home.

The CSS program held several group sessions at the properties throughout the year on topics such as Roommate Relationships, Stress Management, and Maintaining Healthy Coping Skills. The feedback from the consumers was very positive, with requests for more groups in the future.

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. As a result, 7 homeless individuals and 2 CEPP individuals leaving State Hospitals were housed in the past year. Several other consumers were able to prevent eviction due to the advocacy and strong relationships with landlords who trust that the CSS program will go above and beyond to support their consumers and get them the help they need to remain stable in their apartments.

CSS participates in the Annual Consumer Achievement Awards. This year’s award recipient in Morris was a young woman who one year prior, was on the verge of eviction, unstable and living in an unkempt apartment, refusing to engage with staff. Due to the tenacity and persistence of the CSS Recovery counselors, the consumer finally agreed to reconnect with mental health treatment, allowed her case manager to assist in cleaning her apartment, and was able to advocate to the landlord to withdraw the

eviction application. The Essex County award recipient was an individual who over the course of the year, was able to obtain his driver's license, find part-time employment, and was able to graduate from his Methadone maintenance program, all while dealing with the death of both his brother and mother.

CSS goes above and beyond when assisting consumers with special requests that, while out of the ordinary, represent important milestones in their recovery. For example, a husband and wife, both CSS consumers, were able to maintain regular visitation while the wife experienced a broken hip and spent several weeks in the hospital and rehab facility. CSS staff outreached the husband twice a day to ensure he was taking his medication, maintaining his apartment, and was able to keep in contact with his wife.

At MHA's Kingsland Avenue property in Nutley, two neighboring consumers developed a close friendship that became a meaningful source of companionship for both of them. When one individual had to relocate to a nursing home due to increasing medical needs, MHA remained committed to supporting their bond by arranging regular visits for the other consumer. These visits continued until the individual's passing, allowing the friends to spend precious time together in his final days. By making these visits possible, MHA helped provide comfort, connection, and a sense of closure during a difficult time.

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 2027 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 maintain weekly Medicaid billing in preparation for the anticipated transition to a fee-for-service model. CSS continues to proactively prepare for evolving federal regulations affecting Permanent Supportive Housing while remaining steadfast in its commitment to ensuring that no consumer returns to homelessness. Through strategic planning and a person-centered approach, CSS is dedicated to maintaining stable housing and providing the support individuals need to thrive despite a changing regulatory landscape.