

Peer Operated Recovery Treatment and Support (PORTS)
A Mental Health Recovery Model
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Recovery has become a major buzzword in the mental health community. Mental health systems are beginning to focus seriously on assisting people with psychiatric disability to recover and move on with their lives.¹ Scientific research has yielded practices that have an evidence base to support their effectiveness in helping people recover from mental illness. People with psychiatric histories have provided valuable input into system design, pointing to new treatment methods and principles that foster their gaining productive roles in the community and having meaning restored to their lives. SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services has investigated treatment modalities that put control into the hands of people receiving treatment. Self-directed care, person centered planning, and consumer operated services along with evidence based practices have become the cornerstones to achieving the promise of transforming mental health care in America in ways that promote the dignity, respect, and recovery of the individual. The paragraphs that follow offer an example of how various recovery-oriented treatment approaches can operate in concert to promote people moving on with their lives.

The Peer Operated Recovery Treatment and Support (PORTS) Project lies at the core of the proposed treatment delivery system. PORTS is a consumer-operated service program (COSP) that provides treatment coordination and resource brokerage services. Individual customers who have agreed to engage in a recovery plan that includes the goal of obtaining paid or voluntary employment are referred to PORTS by the behavioral health organization. Customers are linked with a Peer Advocate Mentor (PAM) and a Recovery Specialist. The PAM is supervised by the PAM Project, a third party COSP. The PAM will work with the customer to develop recovery strategies and ensure that services are provided in a dignified and respectful manner. The Recovery Specialist is a PORTS employee who will coordinate the customer's mental health and resource brokerage services.

Customers will receive a PORTS orientation within a week of being referred. During orientation customers will hear recovery stories from individuals with similar diagnoses who have taken firm steps to move on with their lives. They will gain hope in learning that people can and do recover from mental illness. Customers will also learn about PORTS' mission, self-directed care, self-determination and recovery principles during this first week.

All PORTS services are delivered through a person centered planning process. Through this process the customer develops a person centered plan with the assistance of a PORTS Recovery Specialist, the PAM, and any individuals the customer invites to be members of the circle of support. Circles of support are generally composed of the family members, friends, and professionals the customer believes are most supportive. The resulting person centered plan is more than a treatment plan. It is a life-plan; complete with the individual's dreams and goals and steps to make them a reality. These steps are detailed in Action Plans.

Each PORTS customer will be allotted an individual resource budget of \$2,000 for the first year of service. Through this budget customers may purchase services and supports within the community or from a participating mental health provider to carry out an Action Plan. Take, for example, an Action Plan with the stated goal of obtaining employment. A step toward this goal may be the purchase of a set of clothes to wear at job interviews. The Action Plan would detail the budgeted

amount for each of these purchases. Core mental health services such as symptom monitoring, medication management, addictions counseling, acute care and crisis services are provided by the behavioral healthcare organization per the person centered plan and are not purchased through the individual resource budget. Fifty percent of the funds that remain in the individual resource budget after an annual cycle of service are carried over into next year's budget. An additional \$500 is added to the second and subsequent year's budgets. All brokered community services and supports purchased through individual resource budgets must be approved by the Recovery Specialist. All purchases over \$100 must be approved by a representative of the behavioral health organization.

After their initial year of enrollment, PORTS customers may increase the size of their individual resource budgets by becoming involved with the Peer Advocacy and Mentoring (PAM) Project. The PAM Project offers PORTS customers the following training options at no charge: Family Psychoeducation; Peer Psychoeducation; Wellness Recovery Action Planning; and PAM Certification. Socialization and peer support in a safe environment is available to PORTS customers at no charge through the PAM Project drop-in center.

PAM Certification training is offered to persons who have been PORTS customers for at least one year and have successfully completed either Family or Peer Psychoeducation and Wellness Recovery Action Planning. Certification coursework is provided over a six-week period; five days a week; six hours a day. Peers facilitate training. Most topics are presented by guest speakers from COSPs and state and local agencies. Graduates are certified by the behavioral healthcare organization or the state mental health authority to provide peer counseling, peer advocacy, peer mentoring, and benefits counseling.

Certified PAMs may choose to work as mentors to PORTS customers, trainers within the PAM project, peer counselors or advocates at participating mental health agencies, or peer counselors at the PAM drop-in center. In most cases Certified PAMs will be compensated through stipend contributions to their PORTS individual resource budget of \$10.00 for every hour of service up to 150 hours per year. Certified PAMs may also be hired as paid employees by PORTS, PAM Project or participating agencies.

PORTS customers who are not able to successfully complete PAM Certification training will be provided support in gaining paid or voluntary employment in the community. Customers who obtain voluntary employment in the community will receive a stipend donation of \$10.00 per hour of service up to 150 hours per year. Customers who become competitively employed will retain their \$500 annual resource budget allotment until they have been gainfully employed for 12 consecutive months. At this point they will graduate from PORTS.

The PORTS and PAM projects encourage people to move on with their lives during and after active treatment. Individuals are provided hope and support. Services are self-directed. This treatment delivery system promotes people empowering themselves toward their own recovery. People are held accountable for their choices by living the outcome of those choices. With each positive step they take, their self-esteem increases. With increased self-esteem they take greater care to make prudent choices. They learn from their mistakes and reap the benefit of their hard work. These are the elements of recovery from mental illness. These are the elements of full and productive lives.

ⁱ Ridgeway, P., et al (1999) Deepening the Mental Health Paradigm, Defining Implications for Practice, <http://www.socwel.ku.edu/mentalhealth/recovery/recovery%20paradigm%20project.htm>