



FROM THE DIRECTORS

Welcome to the first quarterly newsletter of HeadsUp in 2021! As many of you know, our role as your collaborating organization, made possible through funding by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS), is to provide support for all PA first episode psychosis (FEP) sites for early intervention centered around personalized, accessible, and effective care for all people in Pennsylvania (PA) and to decrease stigma around psychosis through education, advocacy, and support. Our newsletters highlight one of our PA FEP centers and invite stakeholders to share their perspectives on various aspects of FEP care implementation and outcomes. In this newsletter we welcome the contribution by Molly Oross, MS, NCC, CPSS, LPC, the Team Lead and therapist for the ENGAGE center in Wilkesburg, PA, who shares her insights into the challenges and rewards of working in the field of early psychosis treatment.

Since our last newsletter, COVID-19 restrictions have continued. We hope that the next few months bring a gradual re-opening in PA, as vaccinations are more widely available and COVID rates decline further. As all of PA FEP sites have been able to effectively implement telehealth services of Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC), we hope this technology, which is very suitable to individualized care for some people, will continue and will remain covered by insurance. We are also excited about the progress of the five new FEP programs, serving Carbon/Monroe, Pike/Wayne, Centre, Chester, and Lehigh counties, and their integration into our Pennsylvania state-wide FEP network.

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FEATURED CENTER

CAPSTONE-HARRISBURG



CAPSTONE is a program designed to provide comprehensive treatment and support for young adults ages 16-30 experiencing early psychosis. The CAPSTONE program is part of the Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute (PPI) that has been helping individuals in Dauphin County since 2017. In October 2019, the program expanded to include two neighboring counties, Cumberland and Perry.

PPI provides clinical services including individual resiliency training (IRT), family education therapy (FE), certified peer support (CPS), and medication management. IRT is focused on achievable goals identified on a treatment plan and development of individual resiliency skills. FE assists the family with understanding the young adults' diagnosis, experiences, and how to best support their family member in their recovery. The certified peer support specialists are individuals who utilize their own experience of mental health recovery to help support others. Peer support services are also available through Merakey.

Collaborating with Dauphin County Case Management Unit and Penn State Holy Spirit Case Management, the team offers traditional case management services and bridges

communication and emergency needs during non-work hours. The YWCA of Greater Harrisburg provides Supported Employment and Education services to support young adults with fulfilling their educational goals and/or work/career goals. Utilizing a team approach, CAPSTONE participants are part of a shared-decision making process to create a comprehensive treatment plan integrating all services areas. This collaborative approach considers the best clinical evidence available, as well as the young person's values and preferences.



AMANDA FOOKS,
CAPSTONE
DIRECTOR

Amanda Fooks has been working with individuals experiencing psychosis since 2010 and has been dedicated to the CAPSTONE program since its inception in March 2017. Under Amanda's leadership, the CAPSTONE program has expanded substantially. She coordinates a team of providers from multiple agencies to provide comprehensive care for individuals with first-episode psychosis. In addition, she has been instrumental in efforts at Pennsylvania Psychiatric Institute to expand and improve care of people experiencing psychosis across the life span. This has become her passion and she continues to strive to engage and motivate her participants and staff alike.

RESEARCH NEWS

PA FEP PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCE IMPROVED SYMPTOMS AND FUNCTIONING

As we recently reported in an article published in [Early Intervention in Psychiatry](#), our Pennsylvania First Episode Psychosis (FEP) Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) participants showed improvement over time in several areas, including decreased symptoms, higher role and social functioning, decreased hospitalizations, and improved self-perception of recovery, quality of life, and services satisfaction. Trends towards improvements were observed for participant happiness, hopelessness, and school-enrollment. Nearly all improvements were observed at 6-month follow-up, with earlier gains maintained at 12-months. Authored by many of our PA FEP staff, this article demonstrates the ability of our CSC programs to assess and improve critical outcomes of coordinated specialty care in Pennsylvania, supporting the continuation of these programs in pursuit of our goal to reduce schizophrenia disease burden on individuals and society.

[Westfall MBE, Kohler CG, Hurford J, Abegunde C, Agosti D, Brinen A, Cadman ML, Conroy C, Ered A, Fooks A, Franco O, Huque ZM, Namowicz D, O'Connor S, Oross M, Payne E, Sarpal DK, Schmidt LR, Swigart A, Wenzel RM, Calkins ME. Pennsylvania coordinated specialty care programs for first-episode psychosis: 6- and 12-month outcomes. Early Interv Psychiatry. 2020 Dec 6. doi: 10.1111/eip.13084.](#)

EPINET

Since fall 2020, our Pennsylvania First Episode Psychosis (FEP) sites have been collaborating with Maryland FEP sites in the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) funded Early Psychosis Intervention Network (EPINET) project.

Led by Monica Calkins, PhD for Eastern PA sites and Deepak Sarpal, MD for Western PA sites, HeadsUp is now part of the Connection Learning Healthcare System (Connection LHS), an EPINET Regional Hub centered at the University of Maryland and led by Melanie Bennett, PhD. As an EPINET Regional Hub, Connection LHS uses data to improve early psychosis services and to promote a culture of collaborative learning and continuous quality improvement across 20 programs delivering Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) for youth and young adults experiencing early psychosis and their families.



CONTRIBUTOR

BURNING BRIGHT BY MOLLY OROSS

I have been the Team Lead for the ENGAGE Program for two and a half years now. If you ever hear me speak about ENGAGE and other First Episode Psychosis (FEP) Programs, you'll notice right away how passionate I am about this work. I'm often asked how I stay so enthusiastic and positive about my work in FEP. I would be lying if I told you it was an easy job. Some days it is so incredibly difficult that I must remind myself why I do it at all. When I have days like this it helps me to remember why I started. It also helps me to take a step back and think about the impact of the work that FEP programs are having on their participants.

My clients truly inspire me. I am blown away by their resiliency and the amazing work they are doing in their journeys to recovery. My very favorite part about my job is that I truly get to see people get better. Not only get better but get better pretty quickly. Now this is very different than what most people think of when they hear "first episode of psychosis." There is still a ton of stigma around psychosis. Not only within the general public, but in the mental health system as well. Nationwide FEP programs are working to end this stigma, and I truly believe that our work is starting to pay off. Some days I feel like I'm burning bright, other days I feel like I'm burning out. No matter how I am feeling I am committed to keep pushing through. This work is exhausting. This is work is challenging. This work is 100% worth it.



Molly Oross, ENGAGE
Team Lead & Therapist



Molly Oross earned her Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from California University of Pennsylvania. She has been the Team Lead of the ENGAGE Program through Wesley Family Services, since 2018. Molly is a Licensed Professional Counselor, National Certified Counselor, and a Certified Peer Specialist Supervisor, who is passionate about reducing the stigma of psychosis. In addition to her work on the ENGAGE Team, Molly is also a private practice therapist in the Pittsburgh area. No matter the setting, Molly prides herself in rapport building and helping her clients identify the motivation to make necessary changes.

FROM THE DIRECTORS CONT...

In fall 2020, we were able to implement the yearly training program virtually with the tireless effort of our HeadsUp Manager, Cat Conroy, MEd. While not in person, the virtual meeting provided a platform for learning, exchange of ideas and support. We were impressed by the level of participation from FEP sites. We also want to extend our gratitude to Irene Hurford, MD, who implemented the Train-the-Trainer Program, enabling providers across different programs to educate their peers. Since fall 2020, the PA FEP sites are also collaborating with Maryland FEP sites in the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) funded Early Psychosis Intervention Network (EPINET) project in FEP, which establishes a Learning Health Care System across our two states. This is being coordinated by Monica Calkins, PhD for Eastern PA sites and Deepak Sarpal, MD for Western PA sites.

In the past month, HeadsUp has coordinated meetings with all FEP sites and we have taken note of feedback about how our collaborations can grow and become more effective. As we enter the next several months and spring, we will be in contact about organizing provider-specific supports across all programs through periodic meetings stratified by type of care, for example, supported employment and education, peer support, psychotherapy and medication management. With the support and guidance of the HeadsUp Steering Committee, we have also started to highlight the issues of substance use, in particular cannabis, and racial disparity interfering with access to effective care in the population we serve.

Since our first newsletter, the HeadsUp Team has expanded - please allow us to introduce Crystal Vatz, MS, LPC, NCC, BC-TMH, our Telehealth and Education Manager; Lucy Miao, BS, who assists Megan Westfall, MS with statewide data collection, program evaluation and fidelity review; and Donna Bencivengo, MS who will collaborate with the Eastern PA FEP sites for the EPINET effort with Maryland.

Ongoing efforts in the next few months will include advancing the ability of our FEP programs to inform clinical care by improving access to participant's clinical data, conducting rapid and efficient neurocognitive testing, and increasing our educational outreach.

We remain grateful for the support and guidance by OMHSAS, SAMHSA (through the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, US Department of Health and Human Services), the HeadsUp Steering Committee, and providers, participants, families and mental health advocates for our collaborative efforts as we strive to achieve the HeadsUp mission.

Monica E. Calkins, PhD
Co-Director



Christian G. Kohler, MD
Co-Director



OUTREACH NEWS

HeadsUp is excited about the launch of our [NEW WEBSITE!](#) Centered around young people, it serves as both an educational hub for our many stakeholders as well as a connection to our PA FEP centers. In conjunction with our new website, we have created a short [educational video, "What is Psychosis?"](#), which is available to use and share. These additions, along with our social media presence, will help boost statewide outreach efforts, enhancing our visibility and presenting a clear, concise connection to care for early psychosis. Thank you for helping us to spread the word about these resources!

