



# THE BRIDGE

Winter 2006

Family-centered recovery for mental illness & substance use disorders.

## WestBridge values

WestBridge strives to be collaborative, person-centered and recovery-oriented. We have developed the following set of values that we want to be reflective of our relationships with our participants, families, co-workers and colleagues.

- Hope, respect, teamwork and direct communication are the core elements of our culture.
- We want everyone we interact with to experience our compassion, thoughtfulness, integrity and responsiveness.
- Everything we do is driven by a desire to develop authentic relationships. We encourage you to let us know when we are living up to these values and when we are falling short. By working together, we can make treatment a positive, hopeful experience. ■

## Strength-based recovery refocuses perspectives

All of us at WestBridge – participants, families and staff – experience, at varying degrees, the effects of mental illness and substance use disorders. We each have our own perspective or lens that is valid and at times conflicting.

Through the lens of our participants, we have learned about how it feels to “be sent away,” to feel inadequate around others and to feel the shame and guilt associated with symptoms and substance use.

Through the lens of our families we have learned about the hopes, dreams, frustration, grief, loss and hopelessness they experience as their role changes from family member to caregiver to “cop” and to “enemy.”

Through the lens of the staff, we have been trained to diagnose illness, assess for deficits and focus on symptoms. As we strive to move beyond the illness deficit approach to a strength-based recovery approach, we all need to refocus our lenses.

Participants and families that engage in Family Education and Support learn new communication and problem-solving skills. As a result, the course of treatment is smoother, crises diminish and relationships improve.

As staff, we know that when we establish authentic relationships with participants and families, we can work collaboratively on treatment and empower everyone to



take responsibility for his or her own recovery. We have learned to focus on the whole person, to identify strengths and to value the individual and family experience. We have learned as a staff that we need to

work as a team and rely on each other as we learn new skills.

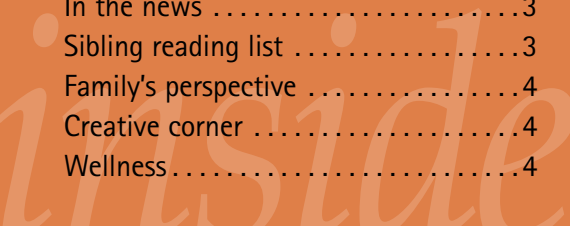
All of us – participants, families and staff – are on a path of recovery and growth. Together, we can learn, grow and support one another on this journey. ■

*“Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishments.”*

*Jim Rohn*

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## Family resources

Based on cognitive behavioral therapy, Family Education and Support helps individuals look at how their thoughts, beliefs and perceptions affect their feelings, which influence behavior. FES is highly effective in reducing family stress, diminishing hospitalizations, and decreasing relapses from mental illness and/or substance use.

FES assumes that families know what is best for their loved one's care. Lois Hollow, ARNP, FES coordinator, and members of the WestBridge team, talk with each family member to understand what might be most helpful. Communication skills are reviewed and problem-solving strategies are employed to empower families to utilize everyone's input in arriving at solutions. Sessions also focus on a participant's symptoms, medications, how stress and substance use can affect symptoms and other topics.

Families are invited to participate no matter where they live. Our FES conference calls unite family members who otherwise would not be able to connect regularly. Family members are at the heart of the treatment we provide and their participation in their loved one's care can make all the difference. The best outcomes are possible with family input. ■



## One family's experience

"Our family sessions have helped to break down the fear and barriers of communicating," says Katherine,\* whose 26-year-old son Jeff is living at The Commons, WestBridge's residential program for men age 18 and over with dual disorders. "The process has made talking more normal and natural."

Each week at a set time, Katherine and her husband, who live 500 miles away, participate in a conference call with Jeff, if he is inclined, and his WestBridge counselor. In the two months that Jeff has participated, communication has become easier and he initiates calls home more frequently.

"We need practice talking together and getting over our fears," says Katherine. "We used to be very fearful of confronting Jeff. WestBridge has taught us to listen to him and respect what he has to say."

For Jeff to be accepted into the program at The Commons, both Katherine and her husband had to agree to participate in the Family Education and Support sessions. Katherine says this requirement helped her as her husband must share in the experience, despite his very busy work schedule.

The sessions have expanded their interactions with their son, with Jeff's counselor encouraging them to ask Jeff what he thinks. "We have learned to let Jeff make decisions. It has forced us to let Jeff have a voice," says Katherine, who is pleased that he has stepped out into the world to take a course at a local community college.

"The program has broken down the barriers to communication," she adds. "It has opened Jeff's door." ■

*\*The names in this article have been changed.*

## did you know?

Melissa Edney has a new role at WestBridge. She is our new customer relations coordinator, responsible for developing and monitoring relationships with individuals, families and referral sources. She will also collaboratively develop and monitor WestBridge's communication strategy.

In her new position, Melissa will oversee client service and satisfaction, making sure that clients who request services are contacted and receive appropriate services. With new referrals, she will monitor the inquiry and evaluation process, as well as communicate WestBridge's values and vision.

Melissa will also identify emerging trends in the field through research and attendance at conferences, ensuring that WestBridge remains at the forefront in practicing effective treatment strategies for individuals with co-occurring disorders. ■



*Melissa Edney,  
Customer relations  
coordinator*

## Hope and recovery: Family and the holidays



There was a time in my family's life when I didn't think we would gather together ever again for holidays with our minds playful and laughter displacing grave topics of distress. Hardly an art aficionado, I see my family's journey with my schizophrenia analogous to viewing pointillism-style paintings. The first couple years of illness – ever so serious – we lost the laughter and the joy, as we looked ever closely at a tapestry of mangled, non-patterned dots that had become my and my family's hollowed-out lives.

Holidays were similar to any other days, in that they were serious times. It took years of education, tears and understanding to come to a place where we could relax enough to step backwards as a family, enabling the dots to become a clear, vivid picture. Schizophrenia was real, but at least we knew what we were dealing with.

One of the most hopeful things about the holidays is that my family did not tiptoe around schizophrenia. We laughed a lot, celebrated the expected birth of my niece and the first night of Hannukah falling on Christmas. We talked a lot, but schizophrenia did not come up as a point of conversation nor did it awkwardly hang in the silence, as if to beg for air time. I almost take for granted relegating the holidays that revolved around sickness to the past.

It no longer overshadows this joyous time of year. Now, it is as if there's a series of dots and if you back up far enough, there's a beautiful picture. ■

by Lisa Halpern, peer  
mentor, WestBridge  
Community Services,  
Cambridge, MA

## in the news

### South Florida Recovery Fest

WestBridge staff, including Mary Woods, John Ahman and Alfred West, attended the South Florida Recovery Fest 2005 in Boca Raton, Florida, September 24-25. The weekend celebration of addiction recovery was sponsored by Watershed Addiction Treatment, a program that treats over 2,500 patients annually, and NAADAC, an association for addiction professionals.



WestBridge's golf team, (l to r) Matthew Matos, Alfred West and Mary Woods, won three prizes at Watershed's Recovery Fest golf tournament, two closest to the pin and the longest putt.

### 2005 NAMI Walk

WestBridge's Melissa Edney chaired the NH NAMI Walk on October 2 and many WestBridge staff participated. ■

The following books are recommended reading for families:

#### *Changing For Good*

James O. Prochaska, PhD

John C. Norcross, PhD

Carlo C. Diclemente, PhD

Simple self-assessments, informative case histories and concrete examples help clarify each stage and process. Whether your goal is to start saving money, to stop drinking or to end other self-defeating or addictive behaviors, this revolutionary program will help you implement positive personal change...for life.

#### *I Am Not Sick I Don't Need Help*

Xavier Amador with Anna-Lisa Johanson

This book addresses one of the toughest and most emotional problems in delivering mental health services. It offers a sensitive presentation of a practical, clinically sound approach to getting a severely ill person to accept needed treatment.

#### *The Skipping Stone: The Rippling Effect of Mental Illness in the Family*

Mona Wascow

Interviews with 100 family members provide insight into the effects of severe mental illness on parents, siblings, spouses, children and extended family. From her research and as the mother of a schizophrenic son, she discusses emotional responses and coping strategies for families.

#### *When Someone You Love*

*Has a Mental Illness*

Rebecca Woolis, MFT

Exciting and vital current information about recovery from mental illness and substance abuse while addressing short-term, daily problems of living with someone who has a mental illness, and long-term planning and care. ■



## Family's perspective

### Family-to-Family Program Increases Understanding

Gaining insight into a family member's mental illness makes coping with the illness easier. With this focus, NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) offers a free 12-week Family-to-Family Education Program that helps family members enhance their understanding of mental illness.

The two-and-a-half-hour weekly program, developed by NAMI's Joyce Burland, PhD, discusses brain biology, medications, communication skills, specific mental illnesses and self-care for the family member with mental illness. Course materials include an extensive manual and handouts.

Annette Carbonneau, now a NAMI New Hampshire staff member, was introduced to NAMI five years ago when she participated in a Family-to-Family Education Program to better understand a family member's mental illness. "The program is life changing," she says, "because you gain insight in working through the challenges, and it enables you to help your loved one and yourself."

Susan Shaw of the WestBridge Cambridge office is a Family-to-Family facilitator in Massachusetts.

For information, visit [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org).

## Creative corner

We invite our readers to share their artwork, essays, photos and poems.

*Drinking is bad for your health.  
Notice the bottle in the painting.  
Notice the skeletons. Don't let  
the Grim Reaper visit you!*

— A.R., November 2005



# wellness

## Avoiding dehydration

While we don't think of dehydration as a problem in the winter, it is common and we need to be aware of the signs of dehydration. Symptoms may include dizziness upon standing, headache, tiredness, thirst and frequent urination.

Individuals also should be familiar with their medications' side effects as dehydration concentrates drugs in the blood, increasing side effects, which can be particularly risky with lithium. Many antipsychotic medications interfere with temperature regulation, perception and sweating, increasing dehydration.

To stay hydrated, drink adequate water rather than coffee, soda, juice or beer, which are laden with caffeine and/or calories. It is recommended that a person drink eight glasses of water per day, use lip balm and moisturize skin daily. ■

We welcome your comments about this issue of *The Bridge* and invite you to submit ideas for future stories.

To contact us and for more information on our services, visit

**WESTBRIDGE.ORG**

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