



THE BRIDGE

Family-centered recovery for co-occurring mental illness & substance use disorders

Summer 2006

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. ■

WESTBRIDGE

COMMUNITY SERVICES

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Relapse and recovery: time, patience, hope

Mental illness and substance use disorders are chronic medical conditions needing lifelong attention and treatment. Both require major lifestyle changes and, as with diabetes, hypertension and asthma, compliance to treatment may wax and wane.

At WestBridge, we base our treatment on the Stages of Change Model. Most of our participants come to us unaware of how deeply their dual disorders negatively affect them or their families (Precontemplation Stage) or they may be ambivalent about accepting (Contemplation Stage) that they have a dual disorder. When people are in these stages they may not agree to take medications, refrain from using substances or agree to change other aspects of their lives.

"Insight doesn't happen often on the click of the moment... but comes in its own time and... from nowhere but within."

Eudora Welty

This is normal behavior and people DO NOT relapse during these stages as they have not yet made a decision to treat their illnesses.

We target treatment interventions that will resolve ambivalence and

enable people to decide to be healthy and live productive lives. Families may become frustrated, disappointed, or feel that treatment is not working because their family member is not taking medication or staying sober. Because the family is in the Action Stage of change and the family member is not, conflict and disappointment are common.

Once people decide (Preparation Stage) to take medications, become sober, lose weight, etc., they need to develop new coping skills, social activities and other lifestyle changes. During this stage, some people may relapse, which we use as a learning opportunity to help the participant and the family get to a new level of recovery.

Treatment of chronic illnesses is effective, but it takes time, patience and hope. Our rallying cry at WestBridge is, "Recovery is a marathon, not a sprint!" ■



inside

Parent's perspective

For the past three months, my son Steve* has been a resident of The Commons, WestBridge's residential program in NH. He is now taking care of himself mentally and physically, going to the gym daily and eating better. He is conscious of making good choices in life.

WestBridge's goals program has been important in his recovery. Each morning he sets goals for the day and each evening he reviews the status of his goals with a counselor.

Steve is not the type of person who talks freely or easily identifies what he is struggling with, so WestBridge's one-on-one counseling has been beneficial. The counselors help him identify a problem and how he can solve it, rather than the traditional way of offering suggestions. In our family sessions we have worked on communication and building family strength and individual strength for him.

He has been taking summer courses at a local college and will soon move on campus while he continues daily contact with WestBridge staff on and off campus. They will help him with issues and he will continue his daily AA meetings.

Steve has learned a lot at The Commons and is ready to face the challenges of what lies ahead. ■

*Not his real name.

Stress can impact mental illness

WestBridge's Stress Vulnerability Model helps participants and families understand how stressors impact an individual's predisposition to mental illness. Research indicates that a person's vulnerability to developing a psychiatric disorder is primarily determined by genetic and early biological factors.

Mental illness is not thought to be hereditary, but a predisposition to react to environmental influences that lead to a mental disorder can be. Individuals who have a genetic predisposition are more vulnerable to environmental stressors. Stress can trigger the onset of a psychiatric disorder in these people or worsen symptoms in a person with the condition.

Negative events, such as loss of employment, death of a loved one and frequent arguments, can severely challenge an individual's ability to adapt. Protective factors play an important role in preventing a biologically vulnerable person from developing a mental illness. The more protective factors a person has, the greater the chance for a favorable outcome.

At WestBridge, we help people acquire tools to stay well and reduce stress, such as teaching families support skills through our Family Education and Support Program. Our participants also learn adaptive coping skills through cognitive behavioral therapy and by learning to use a WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) to cope with stress.

Other treatments include medication, daily exercise, self-expression, AA/NA 12-step meetings and social supports, group therapy, proper nutrition/sleep patterns, as well as adding meaningful structure to a participant's day. All of these factors help participants decrease their vulnerability to stress and increase their overall adaptability in life. ■

did you know?

Relapse prevention: factors and warning signs

- Isolation: not attending self-help meetings
- Obsessive thinking about using drugs or drinking
- Setting unrealistic goals: perfectionism and being too hard on yourself
- Constant boredom, irritability, lack of routine and structure in life
- Sudden changes in psychiatric symptoms
- Dwelling on resentments and past hurts, anger, unresolved conflicts
- Avoidance: refusing to deal with personal issues and other problems of daily living
- Ignoring relapse warning signs and triggers ■

Source: <http://www.draonline.org/relapse.html>

Hope and recovery: stress and relapse



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

For me, the toughest impediment to mental health is stress. It can be anything that disturbs the equilibrium, from daily hassles like traffic jams to major life events like the break-up of a relationship or returning to employment after a long illness-related hiatus. Going through a stressful event doesn't necessarily mean I'll sink into a deep depression or have bouts of paranoia, but stress definitely increases my vulnerability and reminds me that I live with schizophrenia.

No matter how healthy I feel, stress makes me face the possibility of relapse. I know that recovery is a process and I should expect to slide backwards on the way to moving ahead, but thinking about being in pain is difficult, especially when I want to focus on a positive future. Viewing relapse as a launching point in better preparing myself for the next stressors is helpful.

To avoid relapse, I stay aware of signals that I am becoming over-stressed. These could include sleeplessness, skipping meals, exhaustion after driving or avoiding telephone calls. Countering stress requires putting recovery and self-care ahead of other considerations. Some examples might include making a personal commitment not to skip appointments and to attend meetings or support groups regularly, cutting down on time spent driving, paying attention to eating and sleeping requirements, talking to friends or family on the phone or in person, doing things that are enjoyable and relaxing, and striving for a positive outlook.

With effort and practice, my list of ways to deal with stress has expanded, my incidence of relapse has decreased and relapse has become part of the natural process of recovery. ■

Participant's perspective

HOPE

I do not miss the melancholy
Pain of laughing at myself
The deprivations endured
At the cost of my dignity

I cannot forget
The cocaine longing
Guilt, regret, and lust
Simply sketched in the white lines of
desire

I have done my time
As much as I am willing
In the depths of despair
No longer can the sickness of my mind
Hold me there

For myself there is only
One thing left
Hope
With its many shades,
Even in purple
Pregnant bruises of the past

Eric Reinach

Members of the WestBridge team participated
in the NAMI MA Walk.



in the news

Lois Hollow, ARNP, WestBridge's Family Program Coordinator, has collaborated on a cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) manual for care managers to use with participants experiencing thought disorders.

CBT helps people identify distorted thoughts and practice skills to replace them with positive thoughts.

In May, Lois met with Dr. Narsimha Pinniti at an international CBT conference in New York, where they worked on a chapter of the manual. She participated in a panel discussion and role-played CBT techniques used in the manual.

The *CBT for Psychosis* manual will be published by the end of this year and WestBridge staff will pilot the manual this fall to offer participants the latest evidence-based therapies.

WestBridge will present the manual at the International CBT for Psychosis Conference in Amsterdam next spring. ■





Dr. Bob

Robert Drake, MD, PhD

How can substance use relapse be prevented?

People with dual disorders need healthy and protective environments, such as self-help groups, peer-support communities or Alcoholics Anonymous. Short-term and long-term residential programs can be helpful, too.

Also important is making fundamental changes in their lives, such as finding satisfying jobs, abstinent friends, networks of people in the process of recovery, and a sense of meaning. Supported employment should be at the core of a program.

Family psychoeducation programs are also critical because excellent communication and reinforcement skills are needed to help someone with dual diagnosis attain recovery.

Specific and individualized treatments for severe mental illness, substance use disorder, and other co-occurring problems such as attention deficit disorder are needed as each situation is different.

The person with dual diagnosis and the family may also need help to maintain hopefulness.

For Dr. Bob's full article on strategies for relapse prevention, visit www.westbridge.org. ■

Creative corner

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

Written by Donna Faulds and submitted by a WestBridge participant

Birthright

Despite illness of body or mind,
In spite of blinding despair or
Habitual belief, who you are is whole.
Let nothing keep you separate from the truth.
The soul, illuminated from within, longs to
Be known for what it is. Undying,
Untouched by fire or the storms of
Life, there is a place inside where
Stillness and abiding peace reside.
You can ride the breath to go there.
Despite doubt or hopeless turns of
Mind, you are not broken. Spirit surrounds,
Embraces, fills you from the inside out.
Release everything that isn't your true nature.
What's left, the fullness, light, and shadow, claim
All that as your birthright.

wellness

What is WRAP?

Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) is a program designed to help people with mental illness and/or addictive disorders develop personal plans to reduce uncomfortable and emotional symptoms.

Mary Ellen Copeland developed WRAP through personal research to overcome her symptoms of mental illness and physical pain. She initiated WRAP workshops to help others take a more active role in their treatment and management of symptoms.

WRAP empowers individuals to learn more about their symptoms and how they can better manage them to improve their quality of life. The program includes identifying triggers, early warning signs, crisis management, post crisis plans and using coping skills to maintain daily health and wellness.

At WestBridge, offering group and individual work on WRAP has empowered participants to become more aware of their symptoms that get in the way of personal goals and how to manage these symptoms. ■

comments

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

or call us at

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