

PACT

Program for Assertive Community Treatment

Provides state-of-the-art treatment for individuals with mental illness who are unable to participate in traditional services

Summary

PACT (Program for Assertive Community Treatment) is the most extensively researched program model available, and is commonly regarded as the most “evidence-based” approach for community support of people with severe psychiatric disabilities. The PACT team provides state-of-the-art treatment for men and women with mental illness who are unable to participate in traditional services, often because of severe cognitive challenges, discomfort in social situations, significant addiction to drugs and alcohol, homelessness, and court involvement. The PACT model is very empowering in its implementation because it offers clients only what they need, when they need it, usually at the setting where they live and in a manner that is most acceptable to them. In addition to more conventional mental health treatment, assistance is also provided in areas of



Wendy Webber, PACT Director



The PACT headquarters is used for meetings, staff offices and occasional client conferences.

housing, careers, meaningful relationships, symptom alleviation and accessing medical care.

Clientele

PACT is reserved for the men and women with serious and persistent mental illnesses whose multiple problems have prevented them from using the conventional mental health system effectively. Sometimes the combination of a severe psychiatric condition with substance abuse, and a history of trauma or social deprivation, result in a life spinning out of control. The consequence is often homelessness and legal involvement that can make life even more difficult, and lead to hopelessness and a loss of trust in the regular system of support. PACT offers a highly integrated approach that eliminates barriers that prevent people in this situation from getting the help they need to bring their lives under control.

Referrals

Referrals are made to the program by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health. Case Managers from the Massachusetts Mental Health Center, the Dr. Solomon Carter Fuller Mental Health Center, and Bay Cove Mental Health Center can make referrals through their centers' Director of Community Services. Individuals served by those centers and those who support them should contact those centers' Case Management services.

PACT Program

The PACT Team

To accomplish the PACT objectives, Bay Cove has assembled a multidisciplinary team comprised of a highly experienced Team Leader/Program Director, a half-time Psychiatrist, three Registered Nurses, and six staff clinicians including a Substance Abuse Specialist, a Vocational Specialist, a Housing Specialist and a Peer Advocate.

PACT takes all the services usually provided by a number of different providers and consolidates them in one inter-disciplinary team. Most people with psychiatric disabilities attend an outpatient clinic where they see a psychiatrist in a “med group” and a therapist or case worker, attend a day program or supported employment center, and either live in a group residence or receive support from a housing team. They must keep appointments and either facilitate communications effectively among the various helpers or hope that those professionals communicate well to coordinate their efforts. If someone with a disability fails to keep appointments and has trouble reconciling often contradictory treatment plans, that person can easily “fall through the cracks.” PACT provides the psychiatrist (with a manageable caseload), nurses, therapists and rehabilitation support staff needed to provide all of the services in a personalized and integrated way.



Clients receive assistance with budgeting and bill paying.

The PACT model is uniquely responsive in that the team operates seven days a week and is available by telephone twenty-four hours a day. Level of contact can vary widely – from a single visit each week to several contacts per day during times of crisis. PACT clients need not come to the program offices to access services. Instead, staff members usually will go to them, visiting them at home, at work, in local coffee shops and other community settings familiar to them. Over 75% of services are provided outside of the office.

In practice, this means that PACT may provide services such as daily medication delivery to a homeless client on the street, or regular supportive therapy while grocery shopping. A careful, rigorous assessment and treatment planning process helps clients identify areas where the team can provide them with support as well as training to assume more responsibility themselves. In this way people who were thought to lack the ability to live independently are able to secure and maintain their own apartments, getting just the help they need to live safely and move forward into more active and productive lives.

Services Provided

The client engagement process is quite time consuming.

The initial step is a clinical assessment by the psychiatrist, and an informal negotiation with the client to determine the types and amounts of medication that would be most helpful. The psychiatrist and nurses also evaluate general medical issues as part of the assessment. Some people supported by the team have serious medical conditions, and nurses on the team help them manage and access specialized medical care when necessary. The other most common initial goal is assisting homeless individuals in finding permanent housing. If the client needs support to take medication according to prescription, a plan is set up that often involves team nurses packing medications and then clinicians visiting as often as necessary to drop

them off. These visits provide an opportunity to engage in a brief conversation and provide whatever practical support is needed. PACT assists clients in money management, including bill paying and budgeting of daily expenses. The program serves as a Rep Payee for many of its clients. Team staff also provides career support, helping to plan for employment, education and job training, and assists with other aspects of living, such as housekeeping, food shopping and preparation, and dealing with friendships and other social issues.

Because PACT is prioritized by DMH for people with multiple challenges, the program deals with crisis situations on a daily basis. These often include a flare up of psychiatric symptoms, an acute medical need, or intervention around arrests and court procedures, or threats to housing. The team has been very successful in responding quickly to situations because team members review every person they support on a daily basis, and the program is staffed 365 days per year. The fact that the team manages every aspect of the lives of the individuals they support enables them to identify problems early on and often intervene effectively. They remain involved through periods of hospitalization and incarceration and gradually help each individual learn how to take better control of their lives and avoid future problems.

PACT services are designed to be delivered for an indefinite period of time, as long as the individual served is benefiting from the service and is in need of support. A team of two to four clinicians is assigned as the primary supporters of an individual (called an Individual Treatment Team), and the program's long-term nature allows for the time necessary to develop an effective helping relationship. The person in recovery has time to get to know and trust the members of the team and they in turn have the time to get to know and understand that person as a unique individual. As time goes on, the focus shifts from gaining control over immediate crises to establishing and pursuing

life goals. These include establishing a network of meaningful personal relationships, education and employment as part of a career, and putting down roots in the community. Sometimes people served by the team are able to repair and re-establish relationships that had fallen apart earlier. Often the fact that the individual has endured very hard times with the ongoing support of the team helps set the stage for the development of trust needed to pursue more ambitious goals later on.

Building and Location

The program offices are located in a new brick office building at 3313 Washington Street in Jamaica Plain.

*For more information about the PACT Program,
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Bay Cove Human Services PACT Program

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