

Family Resource Center (FRC)

The FRC includes the following programs and services:

- I. IFSS - Intensive Family Support Services – Essex and Sussex County**
- II. “Thursdays” - Family Respite Consumer Drop-In Center**
- III. Project F.E.R.S.T. – Family Emergency Room Support Team**
- IV. Information and Referral Services**

I. Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS) in Essex and Sussex County

Description: Intensive Family Support Services are designed to provide support, education, advocacy, and respite to family members who are coping with the mental illness of a loved one. Throughout the last year, IFSS services were delivered in a hybrid fashion providing an option for families to come in-person or receive services through virtual platforms. Through individual supportive counseling sessions, psychoeducational workshops, family support groups, respite services, and telephone consultations, families learn skills to help them cope with the associated stress of caring for a loved one with mental illness.

Location and Hours of Operation:

IFSS Essex - Services are provided from the office located at 33 South Fullerton Avenue, Montclair. IFSS hours are Monday through Friday, 9:00AM to 5:00PM, with evening availability for appointments, workshops and support groups. Families can also reach out and connect to an Essex IFSS on-call worker anytime the agency is closed.

IFSS Sussex - Services are provided at 83 Spring Street, Suite 302B, Newton, during the hours of 9:00AM to 5:00PM, Monday through Friday, with flexibility for evening appointments when requested. Families are able to reach their Family Support Counselor after hours through MHA’s on-call procedure.

Personnel:

IFSS Essex – One Coordinator/Family Support Specialist, one part-time Family Support Specialist, one full-time Family Support Counselor, and several graduate interns and community volunteers.

IFSS Sussex - One Coordinator/Family Support Specialist, two part-time Family Support Counselors, and one-two graduate interns throughout the year.

Essex Program Highlights:

During FY2023, IFSS facilitated 108 virtual family support group sessions. Of these, 23 sessions incorporated skills-based learning for families and consumers, with an emphasis on communication and problem solving. In addition, 38 psychoeducational workshops, 54 consumer respite sessions and 28 arts-based respite sessions for family caregivers were conducted to counteract increased stress resulting from coping with caregiving during the pandemic.

Family Support Groups: IFSS Essex offered four distinct opportunities for families to engage in professionally facilitated support groups during the past fiscal year: a weekly Thursday morning session, a twice a month Wednesday evening session, a monthly evening meeting of adult siblings of people with mental illness, and a twice a month Family and Consumer Connection (FCC) group. The FCC group is a structured, problem-solving group attended by both family members and mental health consumers to increase understanding about mental illness, improve socialization, teach coping skills, and foster connection. IFSS Essex facilitated 108 support group meetings this fiscal year.

Psychoeducational Workshops for Families: During the fiscal year, IFSS focused on educating family members about the resources available for their loved one. Internal and local resources, such as Community Support Services (CSS), Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH), and Psychiatric Emergency Screening. Psychoeducation was also provided on the following topics: substance use disorders; bipolar disorder; depression; anxiety; the biological basis of mental illness, cultural factors and coping with stigma; schizophrenia and psychosis, etiology, symptoms and treatment.

Arts-Based Respite Workshop Series: IFSS art therapist, together with graduate interns from Caldwell University, provided art therapy-based groups. These groups focused on respite for family members of people with SMI, covering topics of stress relief and self-care, identity, the role of caregiver, and navigating family members. These groups are intended to provide education, relief, connection, and an opportunity for self-expression.

Sussex Program Highlights:

IFSS facilitated 73 family support group sessions and 24 psychoeducational program sessions during the FY2023. These were programs designed to teach families and/or the community about diagnosis, treatment options, available services, and coping skills they can utilize when caring for a loved one. Psychoeducational series for IFSS Sussex focused on providing information on available resources such as MHA's Wellness Hub, as well as ways to increase problem solving skills. Additionally, there was a special psychoeducational workshop for siblings, "When your sibling has a mental illness."

At Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital, IFSS Sussex continued to advocate at the *Concerned Families Group* monthly meeting in order to assist Sussex County families in advocating for their loved ones who are hospitalized at Greystone.

Performance Outcomes: IFSS Essex

The IFSS Essex program produced 3,610 units of service, 156% of its overall targeted program commitment for the 2023 fiscal year. Supportive Telephone Contacts (177%) and Multiple Family Support Groups (156%), conducted remotely, significantly exceeded contracted thresholds. Psychoeducational Sessions, conducted both in-person and through virtual platforms, were also higher than expected and extended to include bilingual youth, children of parents with mental illness, and a high school mental health club (277%). Some IFSS families returned to in-person consultations, with many opting to continue virtual telehealth support. Combined, these

exceeded targeted goals at 113%. “Thursdays” drop-in social group for consumers, and “Intuitive Tuesdays” art therapy for caregivers combined to bring IFSS out of home respite above the projection for the year (241%). Collateral contacts nearly tripled its target goal this year (290%). IFSS Essex was able to serve 190 families this fiscal year.

Performance Outcomes: IFSS Sussex

IFSS Sussex produced 1,676 units of service, 97% of its overall targeted program commitment for the FY2023. The program provided levels of service exceeding program commitment specifically in five areas: enrolled families (144%), onsite visits (104%), off-site visits (133%), psychoeducational sessions (163%), and supportive phone calls (102%). IFSS Sussex was able to serve 108 families this fiscal year.

Performance Indicators: IFSS Essex

Accessibility: IFSS continued to offer all services remotely which allowed for continuity of support through the changing needs of the pandemic. In this past fiscal year, 85% of families indicated that IFSS staff were available when needed.

Efficiency: IFSS utilized “Wait for Service” as a key performance indicator of efficiency. In this past fiscal year, the average time elapsed from IFSS referral to first contact was less than 2 business days. The average time from this contact to intake was less than 5 business days.

Effectiveness: IFSS measures the effectiveness of its services by recording changes in a family’s perceived level of concern and stress over a six-month time frame. IFSS used a statewide uniform method of calculation with a NJDMHAS approved instrument called the Family Concerns Survey. After analyzing pre and post survey scores, IFSS families indicated an 11% reduction in stress for this fiscal year as a result of receiving family support services.

Technical Data: Monthly chart audits of all active IFSS families were implemented with an annual compliance rate of 84%.

Satisfaction Data: IFSS Essex

Satisfaction with the IFSS program was measured by the NJDMHAS approved instrument that was sent out to approximately 100 families in May of 2023. With a 17% return rate, 17 questionnaires were returned to MHA’s QA Coordinator, who aggregated the raw data for further analysis. The data showed that 76% of respondents were parents, 11% were siblings, 17% had a parent or grandparent with mental illness, and 5% were a spouse, partner or significant other. Families reported a 100% overall satisfaction rate.

Here’s what families have to say about their experience with IFSS Essex:

“I feel empowered and confident in my interactions with my loved one.”

“My biggest support.”

“Enable me to cope better with a lot of stressful family situations.”

Performance Indicators: IFSS Sussex

Accessibility: According to families who responded to our satisfaction survey, IFSS Sussex has shown an accessibility rate of 95% as indicated by the responses to the question, “Was it easy to find out about this program?”

Efficiency: The Wait for Service measurement is a state and agency-generated indicator based on high standards of professional practice that indicate efficiency. IFSS Sussex exceeded the program’s expectation for wait for service which was measured at less than 1 day wait for service and less than 3 days wait for intake.

Effectiveness is measured by the IFSS Family Concerns Scale. This measures effectiveness and impact of services on family stress. An average of a 15% reduction in levels of stress/burden was reported by families in the past year. Given the increased level of stressors experienced by individuals with mental illness and their family caregivers, this rate remains significant.

Satisfaction Data: IFSS Sussex

IFSS Sussex sent a 24-item survey, standardized and mandated by NJDMHAS for IFSS programs, to approximately 80 families in May of 2022. With a 12% return rate, 10 questionnaires were returned to MHA’s QA Coordinator, who aggregated the raw data for further analysis. The data showed that 90% of respondents were parents and 10% were siblings. The overall satisfaction level of IFSS Sussex families was determined to be 100%.

Below are a few comments from IFSS Sussex responders:

“Thank you to each of you for your endless support!”

“I would be lost without the program.”

“It is very clear from the beginning that the agency really cares about the families they serve!!!”

II. Family Respite Services “Thursdays” Consumer Drop-In Center 2022-2023

Description: For the last 23 years, IFSS Essex has facilitated “Thursdays”, a consumer drop-in center that has met every Thursday for 2.25 hours from 6:30PM to 8:45PM. Through this service, families were provided with 2.25 hours of out-of-home respite and relief from caring for their loved ones with a mental illness. IFSS families have been comforted in the knowledge that their loved one has been able to get out of the house and make positive social connections with their peers, both critical to wellness and recovery.

Personnel: “Thursdays” respite group is led by one full-time Acute Family Support Counselor and MHA interns.

Highlights and Data: As the pandemic came to an end, “Thursdays” moved back to providing onsite, in-person respite to individuals.

Due to the interest in the virtual “Thursdays” group, the IFSS team continues to offer a virtual respite group on Tuesday afternoons. This group reaches those individuals who have hesitancy to in-person services because of the COVID-19 virus.

III. Project F.ER.S.T. – Family Emergency Room Support Team 2022-2023

Description: Acute Care Family Support (ACFSP) otherwise known as “Project F.ER.S.T.” is the NJDMHAS contracted service component that provides in-person support, education and advocacy to families while they are in local acute care hospital emergency rooms accompanying their loved ones through the psychiatric screening process. As one of the few community-based acute care family support programs in the state, Project F.ER.S.T. has unique challenges with regard to receiving referrals from all of the Essex County acute care hospitals, which include three psychiatric screening centers. The success of Project F.ER.S.T. relies upon a commitment to maintain relationships with screeners and acute care hospital workers, as these relationships provide Project F.ER.S.T. with the majority of its referrals. As a result, Essex County families benefit from receiving emotional support and education regarding hospital procedures and commitment laws while their loved one is experiencing a mental health crisis.

Personnel: One full-time Project F.ER.S.T. Counselor

Highlights: Although there has been limited family presence in the hospital emergency departments, Project F.ER.S.T. connected with and worked collaboratively with hospital staff via phone to reach families in need. Staff provided supportive counseling, education and linkage to ongoing services via telehealth, continuing to adapt to this new and successful model of service. Over the course of the fiscal year, Project F.ER.S.T. served 76 families and provided 288 follow-up contacts to families.

Throughout the year, Project F.ER.S.T. has maintained a presence at the monthly meetings of the Essex County Systems Review Committee, which provided an opportunity to collaborate with community providers and market program services.

Performance Outcomes:

Efficiency: Efficiency is established by tracking how quickly staff responded to a referral. Using the Wait for Service annual data, an efficient response time is less than 48 hours. Project F.ER.S.T. data shows that 100% of Project F.ER.S.T. services were provided efficiently, responding to families significantly less than 48 hours from when referrals were received.

Satisfaction: In order to ensure that the highest level of quality services for families are maintained, a questionnaire is provided annually to families who received services. During this past fiscal year, 17 surveys were returned. Upon return of the completed questionnaires, the data was aggregated and analyzed. A weighted average was calculated from the responses for each question.

According to the survey responses:

- 100% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that they would recommend Project F.ER.S.T. and that they were satisfied with the services they received.

- 94% strongly agreed that they were treated with respect by the Project F.ER.S.T. Counselor.
- 93% of families reported they coped more effectively with their loved one’s hospitalizations as a result of receiving Project F.ER.S.T. services.
- 94% felt supported and listened to by the Project F.ER.S.T. Counselor.

Many families felt compelled to write positive comments on the back of their satisfaction survey. See below for a few of these comments:

“I know I am not alone in dealing with my loved one’s illness.”

“Access to continuous professional support has been critical in me being able to cope with my child’s health challenges.”

“The advice, kindness, and non-judgmental discussion space has kept me from completely giving up when I was at the end of my rope.”

III. Information and Referral Services 2022-2023

Description: The information and referral service component remains a major gateway to those individuals in the general public seeking mental health services or information. Known as I&R, this component involves responding to phone service requests that come into the Montclair, Parsippany, and Newton offices. It also involves responding to requests for mental health services from individuals who walk in off the street, communicate through e-mail, or make inquiries on the agency’s website. These agency requests for information and referrals are handled by the staff, graduate students, and volunteers from the different programs at each agency location.

Data Highlights: The continued use of the electronic health record to collect data, allowed multiple MHA sites (Montclair, Parsippany, and Newton) to collect and aggregate data in a timelier manner. During FY2023, a total of 326 I&R documented requests were received across the agency.