

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 in 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 staff anytime the agency is closed.

IFSS Sussex - Services are provided at 83 Spring Street, Suite 302B in 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 FY2024, IFSS facilitated 107 family support group sessions. In addition, 29 psychoeducational workshops, 48 consumer respite sessions, and 30 respite sessions for family caregivers were conducted to counteract stress related to their loved one’s illness.

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-monthly Wednesday evening session, a monthly evening meeting of adult siblings of people with mental illness, and a twice-monthly 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.

Family Support Counselors started a Housing Advocacy Committee to help empower the voices of the family members who have concerns related to affordable, safe housing for their loved ones. This committee was comprised of family members and IFSS staff and worked toward advocating for improved housing for individuals living with mental illness.

Psychoeducational Workshops for Families: During the fiscal year, IFSS focused on educating family members about the resources available for their loved one including local resources, such as Plan NJ and local NAMI chapters. Psychoeducation was also provided on the following topics: substance use disorders; bipolar disorder; mood disorders; loneliness, isolation and building social connection; communication fundamentals; and schizophrenia and psychosis, etiology, symptoms and treatment.

Arts-Based Respite Workshop Series: The 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 serious mental illness (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. This year, the IFSS team partnered with Aging in Montclair to implement two Photo Voice groups, which led to an exhibit at the Montclair Library that featured 14 original photographs and personal statements on the topic of aging, caregiving, and life values.

“Finding Your Voice. Empowering Family Caregivers” an interactive workshop to heighten awareness of breathing, body mechanics of voice, and obstacles to communication, with the goal to empower family caregivers was provided to the families of IFSS by actor and owner of “Gifts in Good Company, LLC”, Natasha Gallop.

IFSS Essex Coordinator Renee Folzenlogen was awarded the NAMI NJ Exemplary Provider Award ‘for demonstrating passion, empathy, patience, and cultural competence when serving individuals with lived experience of mental illness and their family members.’

Sussex Program Highlights: IFSS Sussex facilitated 71 family support group sessions and 25 psychoeducational program sessions during the FY2024. 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 treatment providers, and psychiatric screening centers, as well as ways to increase problem-solving skills.

This year, IFSS Sussex emphasized respite care and hosted gatherings for families during the holiday season and beyond. During these gatherings, families were offered a space to socialize and create crafts to memorialize the event. Throughout fiscal year 2024, IFSS Sussex provided 13 respite events.

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 hospitalized at Greystone.

IFSS Sussex was instrumental in the MHA movie screening of *Rose*, which follows two sisters, one of whom is diagnosed with schizophrenia, on their journey to Paris. The screening of the movie was followed by a panel discussion which included IFSS Sussex coordinator Annette Hoffman. The panel spoke to the impact a loved one's illness has on the family relationship, answered questions from the audience, and provided psychoeducation on schizophrenia.

Performance Outcomes: IFSS Essex: The IFSS Essex program produced 3,027 units of service, which is 130% of its overall targeted program commitment for the 2024 fiscal year. Multiple Family Support Groups (164%) significantly exceeded contracted thresholds. Psychoeducational sessions, conducted both in-person and through virtual platforms, were also higher than expected (164%). Some IFSS families returned to in-person consultations, with many opting to continue virtual telehealth support. Combined, these exceeded targeted goals at 147%. "Thursdays" drop-in social group for consumers along with other respite activities combined to bring IFSS out-of-home respite above the projection for the year (217%). Collateral also surpassed its target goal this year (153%). IFSS Essex was able to serve 252 families this fiscal year.

Performance Outcomes: IFSS Sussex: IFSS Sussex produced 2,001 units of service, which is 116% of its overall targeted program commitment for the FY2024. The program provided levels of service exceeding program commitment specifically in multiple areas: total families served (189%), off-site visits (155%), collateral contacts (110%), multifamily support groups (145%), psychoeducational sessions (134%), supportive phone calls (108%), and face-to-face out of home respite (156%). IFSS Sussex was able to serve 142 families this fiscal year.

Performance Indicators: IFSS Essex:

Accessibility: IFSS continued to offer all services remotely or in person which allowed for continuity of support. In this past fiscal year, 100% 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 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 14% 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 90%.

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 24% return rate, 24 questionnaires were returned to MHA's QA Coordinator, who aggregated the raw data for further analysis. The data showed that 75% of respondents were parents, 33% were siblings, and 4% responded with other relationship but did not identify the nature of the relationship. Families reported a 100% overall satisfaction rate.

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

"It has helped me to learn new skills to deal with family issues more effectively. It has provided invaluable insight and education into how to be a more supportive parent even under very difficult circumstances."

"My son and I are both functioning. Because of you, my son has returned to work and is functioning."

"Made me feel less alone and reduced the stigma that comes with being a parent of a child with mental illness (even if that child is an adult.)"

Performance Indicators: IFSS Sussex

Accessibility: According to families who responded to our satisfaction survey, IFSS Sussex has shown an accessibility rate of 91% 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 2 days wait for intake.

Effectiveness: Effectiveness is measured by the IFSS Family Concerns Scale. This measures effectiveness and impact of services on family stress. An average of a 11% 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 15% return rate, 12 questionnaires were returned to MHA's QA Coordinator, who aggregated the raw data for further analysis. The data showed that 75% of respondents were parents, 8% were a spouse, partner, or significant other, 8% were siblings, and 8% identified other as their relationship. The overall satisfaction level of IFSS Sussex families was determined to be 100%.

Below are a few comments from IFSS Sussex responders:

"I've taken anger out of my emotions when dealing with my daughter. The LEAP method helps keep a better line of communication."

“The support, concern and resources are very helpful in assisting families in a variety of situations and are not sure where to turn for help.”

“The staff is more than caring, kind and supportive not only when we are in crisis but the in-between also.”

II. Family Respite Services “Thursdays” Consumer Drop-In Center 2023-2024

Description: For the last 24 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 Family Support Counselor and MHA interns.

Highlights and Data: Since the end of the public health emergency, “Thursdays” has moved back to its original mission of providing a safe space where individuals living with mental illness can create social connections. “Thursdays” has seen an increase in participation; at least 15 individuals attend each week. Throughout the year, “Thursdays” has provided invaluable activities that incorporate the whole person. Some of these activities include:

- Chair Yoga taught by a certified Yoga instructor through the Montclair YMCA
- Screening of the movie Rose which follows two sisters, one living with schizophrenia, on their journey to Paris.
- Brain games such as word search or puzzles.

III. Project F.ER.S.T. – Family Emergency Room Support Team 2023-2024

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 Acute Family Support 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 67 families and provided 147 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 within 1 day 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, 12 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:

- 85% 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.
- 83% strongly agreed that they were treated with respect by the Project F.ER.S.T. Counselor.
- 83% of families reported they coped more effectively with their loved one's hospitalizations as a result of receiving Project F.ER.S.T. services.
- 83% 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:

“This service is vital and when I meet someone that is in my situation, I always say how essential it is to have my family support counselor.”

“I am more informed about certain situation, medical care and behavioral health. This makes it easier to cope or understand my love ones during difficult times.”

“The project helps me to stay focused on my goal that is to get the needed support for my family member & to remain calm under my circumstances.”

III. Information and Referral Services 2023-2024

Description: The Information and Referral (I&R) service component continues to remain 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 FY2024, a total of 852 I&R documented requests were received across the agency.