

# Southwest Counseling Selected as Pilot Site for Promising Youth Program

Southwest Counseling Solutions has been selected by the National Council for Community Behavioral Health as the pilot site for a promising new initiative to help young people with serious mental illnesses integrate into their communities and lead productive lives as they transition to adulthood.

Southwest Counseling Solutions (SWCS) was chosen out of 40 organizations across the county who applied to become the pilot site for the program, which is called Transition Age Youth Project (TAYP).

“As an organization committed to building a healthier community, we are thrilled to be selected for this project,” said Joseph Tardella, executive director of SWCS. “We recognize that transitioning to adulthood is a daunting task for young people who have a mental illness or substance use disorder. Southwest looks forward to collaborating with other agencies in our community to build a meaningful future for these young people.”

TAYP is based on the “Transition to Independence Process” (TIP) model

developed by Dr. Rusty Clark and his colleagues at the National Center on Youth Transition for Behavioral Health at the University of South Florida. The TIP model has proven highly effective in helping young persons successfully transition into adulthood, enabling them to achieve personal goals in employment, education, living situation, personal adjustment, and functioning in the community.

The TIP model uses “transition facilitators” who assess the youth’s needs, assist the youth in setting goals and planning toward those goals, secure appropriate health and human services, and work collaboratively with all service providers and caregivers to develop a strong support network for the youth. Transition facilitators help young persons to make better choices and learn from their mistakes. They also advise and encourage young persons about pertinent steps to realize goals and lead successful lives.

SWCS’s implementation of the model is expected to serve 40 “transition age youth” (age 14 – 21) during the three-year program. The

first year of TAYP is devoted to planning and development. In the second and third years, the project will be put into effect and data collected on how well the youth are progressing.

TAYP is funded through a grant from the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation. The National Council and MTM Services, the behavioral health consulting group engaged to lead the project, will support SWCS in designing the program.

The grant to SWCS provides \$5,000 for planning and development costs during the first year, then \$70,000 per year during the two-year implementation and data collection period.

SWCS not only will receive intensive consultation focused on helping it meet program objectives, but also will be involved in customizing strategies that it can apply after the grant project ends. Data collected from the program will help determine the sustainability of the project to transition youth, both for SWCS and for other public mental health agencies that serve these young people.