

Family Options & Recovery from Mental Illness: A Parent's Perspective

Family Options provides psychiatric rehabilitation and wraparound family teams for parents with mental illness and their children. Mary (a pseudonym) talked about her experience as a parent with mental illness, her recovery, and her experience in *Family Options*. “Six months before I started *Family Options* I was very depressed, suicidal, hearing voices, and having flashbacks; my kids were out of control; and my apartment was atrocious.” Describing the home-based services she received before *Family Options* Mary reported, “She [the home-based clinician] helped out with behavior charts and plans about cleaning up the house, but the kids did not follow through. It didn’t work. I was too depressed to do anything.”

Child welfare referred Mary to *Family Options* at a time when she had to move. Mary said, “Linda [Mary’s family coach at *Family Options*] started to help me clean. She talked to the kids and got to know them. She helped me to move. She saved me \$1,800 by finding people from the club to help [*Family Options* operates out of a clubhouse program]. She even brought me to lunch and wouldn’t let me pay.” Mary continued, “It surprised me that Linda was giving me all this direct help. DSS [Department of Social Services] said she wasn’t supposed to but it felt really good that someone was helping



me because I felt too depressed to do it myself.”

Mary's Family Coach

Mary talked about her work with her family coach. “It took me a few months to trust Linda. I have flashbacks and depression. I have a hard time trusting people. With Linda, I decided what we would do. I really felt that she understood my pain and my worries. We talked about ways to handle my depression, and my kids, who have ADHD and bipolar disorder. She talked to me and helped me to calm down a lot.” Mary continued

that her family coach saw her “... fighting with my children. I was really embarrassed. I was afraid to have DSS see it but it was OK that Linda saw because she needed to see it so she could help me out.” Mary described how her family coach motivated her to accomplish tasks. “Linda motivated me to do things. At first she would clean the house when I couldn’t do much. Then she had me clean with her. One day Linda just held the bag open and said now I could do it myself. And now, I am doing it myself!”

Mary described how her connection to her coach and the program provided other support. “Linda kept urging me to call the [*Family Options*] hotline. At first, I did not want to bother anybody. I always do not want to bother anyone. But I was very depressed and suicidal, so I called it. The hotline was helpful because I knew the people, they knew my story, and adult conversation helped put me in reality and calmed me down.”

Mary's Family Team

Family Options staff, Mary’s coach, and the director conduct Mary’s wraparound family team meetings. The regularly attending members have been her mother, her children’s father, her child welfare worker, her children’s therapists, and the director of the youth and family service

program of her town. Periodically, school personnel have participated on the team.

“I thought team meetings would be a good idea,” Mary reported, “because I wanted something done to help me focus more on my kids and my recovery. We worked on their behaviors and their responsibilities, their mental illness, and getting help with their behaviors in school and with each other... a lot had to do with mental illness.”

Mary described her involvement with the team. “At first I was nervous. There were a lot of people and I didn’t know what to expect. We talked about progress that had been made and things that still needed to be done.” Mary’s family coach would talk with her before meetings to determine what Mary wanted to make sure was addressed. Mary said, “Now, I

feel like I am being heard and listened to. It’s better to have a team because we wouldn’t get so far in school and counseling without one.” Mary reflected, “I am more outspoken now than before... a good thing... I got comfortable with the people in the meeting.”

Recovery

Mary discussed the changes that occurred since her family began *Family Options*. “I have a job now. I don’t need to call the hotline as much. I am getting more sleep and I’m not yelling as much at my kids.” She continued, “I can calm myself better than before. And I have healthy goals for myself and my family now.” She added, “I do feel that *Family Options* goals are the goals that I want to get done and I have not had that experience before

with other programs.”

Mary talked about her recovery from mental illness. “Recovery for me is healing; work; going to counseling two times a week; coming to *Family Options*’ parent group and the clubhouse; making sure my kids are in counseling; getting as much support as I can; and paying attention to my health and losing weight. Recovery is in my hands. It’s time... no one can change me but myself....and I know that I can do it!”

Mary concluded that for recovery, “You have to have good therapy and people that can empathize. Linda is awesome. She is like a good friend even though she not a friend. She always talks to me and helps me out. And definitely *Family Options* is about people that listen to you, that walk the walk, not just talk the talk.”