

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. My name is Lauren Pisano and I am a Clinical Supervisor at the Community Living Services Program (CLS for short) in Portland, CT. CLS is one of the Young Adult Services Residential programs proposed to be privatized. CLS is 5 bed supervised apartment program that teaches young adults independent living skills so they can live independently in the community.

Additionally, the CLS program supports 25 young adults whom are currently living in the community on their own, teaching them the necessary skills to be able to maintain living in the community so they aren't ending up in more expensive levels of care such as group homes, hospitals, jail, etc. This component of the program is unique and does not exist anywhere else in the state. In addition to teaching independent living skills, CLS provides 24-7 transportation to employment, medical, dental and clinical appointments, case management, and recreational activities. Most importantly we provide continuity of care in our staffing which allows us to follow our clients all throughout their treatment within YAS resulting in fewer hospital stays and incarcerations, which translates into the state saving money.

I work with a great team of 12 dedicated state employees who are all trained in trauma informed care for at risk youth. Several of the staff have been who have been employed at CLS since its inception in 2004. It takes a unique and experienced staff to service this population. YAS works with the most challenging young people with serious mental illness, trauma, and substance use disorders. Most often private agencies employ staff that turns over frequently due to low pay. Frequent staff turnover impacts our population negatively as we are often the main source of stability in our young adult's lives. It takes time for a young adult to build a trusting relationship with a staff person; therefore continuity of care is so important. When frequent turnover occurs, it's yet another loss our clients have to cope with.

A major component of the model we base client care on emphasizes on the importance of consistency, building structure/routine, and receiving consistent responses from the care givers. When these elements are disrupted by things such as staff turnover, clients are not receiving the consistent care they need which has been proven successful in their ability to foster independence.

I would like to share a couple success stories that I feel without the strong dedicated team of employees I work with would not be possible. These clients both are in our community program.

CLS supports a young women living in her own apartment who works third shift hours at a diner. She doesn't have access to car, and there are no buses running in the overnight hours in Middletown. Staff are able to transport her to her job which enables her to pay toward her rent and be a contributing member of society.

A young man who completed CLS 5 years ago calls the program almost on a weekly basis looking for support from his previous worker. He calls asking for job leads, apartment openings or how long to bake chicken. Today this young man is employed, living independently in his own apartment, and most importantly is a contributing member of society. He had identified without this program and his primary worker who worked closely with for the 6 years he was with us he wouldn't be where he is today.

Young Adult Services is a unique program in Connecticut. With proper funding for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, we could expand unique programs like these and deliver more of the much needed care Connecticut residents need.