

BEAUTIFUL MINDS

Lifting spirits at Delaware House

The Burlington Behavioral Health Care Division of Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton, provides coordinated prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services tailored to the needs of people with mental health, substance abuse and interpersonal problems.

Among the mental healthcare providers is Delaware House, which serves adults who have experienced mental illness and are in need of psychiatric treatment and psycho-social rehabilitation.

Among the services offered by Delaware House are:

- Partial Care, which provides a wide range of psychiatric rehabilitation groups and activities for mentally ill adults who require a more intensive environment in order to reach their maximum potential for independent living.

- Outpatient Services, which provides ongoing follow-up psychiatric care and therapy for mentally ill adults, inclusive of substance abuse issues.

- Vocational Services, which prepares mental health consumers for work or to further their education.

- Personal Recovery, which provides substance abuse treatment for adults who also experience mental illness.

- Residential Services, which provides a wide range of options from highly structured, supervised group homes to family home care placements and more independent living including Supportive Housing.

The purpose of the residential services is to improve the treatment of consumers who were institutionalized.

According to a former psychiatric nurse, placing the mental-healthcare consumers in a community setting, with proper supervision, lessens the isolation they may feel in an institutional setting.

By living, and sometimes working, in a community, the consumers feel more a part of mainstream society, thereby enhancing their self-esteem and helping them achieve the goal of self-reliance.

— TONY PERSICHILLI

LEARNING TO COPE

Mental-health care consumers acquire life skills

By TONY PERSICHILLI
Staff Writer

WESTAMPTON

Jeremy is an intelligent, articulate and personable young man.

He is working on finishing his education, has managed to put a little money aside and has a very clear plan for his future.

He also suffers from bipolar and post-traumatic stress disorders.

Diagnosed at 17, the baby-faced 22-year-old has attempted suicide 18 times (the last in November 2001) and been in and out of hospitals and mental-health care facilities 36 times.

Now he wants to be a doctor.

"Before I was diagnosed," he said, "I had my life all mapped out. I was an EMT, I was going to go to college."

But then, Jeremy says, his life got "screwed up" by drugs.

"I ran away from home. I felt helpless. I felt hopeless," he said. "Then I tried to commit suicide and went to the hospital and that's when I was diagnosed."

What followed was more suicide attempts and a stay in a homeless shelter.

"I was in other (facilities)," Jeremy said, "but the people here have really helped me."

"Here" is the Delaware House, where Jeremy, and others like him, learn the coping skills necessary for everyday life.

"People come here for a variety of reasons," said Diana Pasca, coordinator of vocational services/community relations for the Delaware House, "and from a variety of places."

"They come for the full-



Trentonian Photo/BOB CASTELLI

Diana Pasca, coordinator of vocational services/community relations of the Delaware House, talks with James (center) and Jeremy. James suffers from social anxiety and depression while Jeremy is afflicted with bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress syndrome.

service programs. They're here every day; they work around the facility. We find housing for them or they come for the partial programs a few days a week.

"And they come from county hospitals, Buttonwood, Ancora. Our goal here is to prevent re-hospitalization."

Jeremy's goal is even loftier.

"My personal goal," he said, "is to live my life without medication."

Jeremy has made progress in that direction and says he has been off medication for a month

now. "People with bipolar disorder run hot and cold," he said. "They have very high highs and very low lows. There's no middle of the road. The medication is to prevent you from going too far one way or the other."

"Working helps too." Jeremy has made progress in that respect, too, and recently entered the vocational program at Delaware House where he works in building and maintenance and in the kitchen.

When he's not working, he attends group therapy

on a daily basis. "The groups here are really intense," Jeremy said. "At the hospital, the main focus is on how you feel today. Here they're more concerned with giving you the skills to cope with life for the rest of your life."

"It's definitely helped me. They teach us everyday things, like how to pay bills, how to clean up after yourself, how to deal with people."

Even people who stare. "I'm 6-9 and weigh about 320 pounds," he said, "so I'm used to people staring at me. I don't think people

ABOUT THIS SERIES: In an effort to raise awareness about mental illness The Trentonian is publishing several articles during Mental Illness Awareness Week which began Sunday.

Today's article is the fourth in an eight-part series chronicling the lives of individuals and families who have battled mental illness.

While their stories have tragic elements, they are also heroic, as these individuals have overcome social stigma, personal denial and the complicated labyrinth of the medical profession and the ever-changing laws which define what is and isn't a disease.

stare at me because of my illness. How would they know?

"But I understand that there are people out there who are prejudiced (against the mentally ill), just like there are people out there who are prejudiced against blacks and other minorities. That's their problem."

Jeremy says that he doesn't worry about things like that because he still has problems of his own.

And he's working on them.

"I think I'm ready to move on," he said. I'd like to be out of here by the new year.

"But while I am here, I'm going to take full advantage of everything they have to offer."

Fighting the feeling of being alone

By TONY PERSICHILLI
Staff Writer

WESTAMPTON — Back in 1990, James started feeling closed in.

He avoided crowds and often would sneak away to be alone in the wide-open spaces.

He knew something was wrong. "I researched my condition in the library," the 45-year-old musician said, "and I was pretty sure I had some kind of social anxiety and maybe even depression."

He was right.

People with anxiety disorders avoid certain everyday routines or activities altogether in an effort to curb the stressful feelings caused by such situations.

They feel anxious all of the time, not just under pressure, and can become "paralyzed" by their own nervousness.

"I still have some issues," James said, "but I'm learning to

cope with them."

James, who also suffers from depression, is learning to cope with his problems at the Delaware House.

He is part of the partial-care program which provides a wide range of psychiatric rehabilitation groups and activities for mentally ill adults who require a more intensive environment in order to reach their maximum potential for independent living.

"I come here every day," James said. "Like a job. In the morning, we have groups that teach you about your illness and discuss treatment plans."

"In the afternoon, we have groups that help us set goals for where we want to be and how to get there."

Where James wants to be is on stage using his music to help get the message about mental illness across to the general population.

"I think I can help people," he said. "And I want to use my music to do it. I want (music) to be a springboard."

First, however, James, like many others at Delaware House, must learn to cope with everyday life.

"There's still a stigma for people with mental illnesses," he said. "And that's one of the things we talk about here."

James also works in building and maintenance at the Delaware House.

"We try to keep the consumers involved with what goes on here," said Diana Pasca, coordinator of vocational services/community relations for Delaware House. "They work around the grounds, they work in the kitchen. It's part of the therapy."

Local facilities that screen for depression

Tomorrow is National Depression Screening Day. It is a nationwide program designed to provide information about the signs, symptoms and treatment of depression, bipolar disorder and other mental health disorders.

Here are some of the facilities in the Greater Trenton area providing screening.

- ASSOCIATION FOR ADVANCEMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH
Princeton, NJ 08540
(609) 452-2088
- BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CENTER
Langhorne, PA 19047
(215) 949-5680
- CARRIER CLINIC
Belle Mead, NJ 08502
(908) 281-1518
- THE DRENK CENTER
Mount Holly, NJ 08046
(609) 835-6180
- HAMPTON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CENTER
Westampton Twp., NJ 08060

- PRINCETON HOUSE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES
Hamilton, NJ 08690
(609) 586-4788
- PRINCETON HOUSE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES
North Brunswick, NJ 08902
(732) 435-0202
- PRINCETON HOUSE OUTPATIENT
Princeton, NJ 08540
(609) 497-4212