

Mary's Story: The Care Review Process in Durham

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Not long ago, Mary found herself homeless. With no friends or relatives to stay with, she spent the next month in a local homeless shelter. How did things come to this?

Mary had worked as a pre-school teacher for more than twenty years, maintained a home and automobile, and paid her bills. During that time, however, she dealt with a variety of physical health problems and suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and major depression. When she recently became unable to keep her job due to her disabling conditions, Mary consulted a placement agency to find other kinds of work, only to be turned down over and over. She applied for Medicaid and disability benefits but was denied coverage.

Mary had multiple needs and the prospect of dealing with so many issues at once within what can be a fragmented service delivery system was understandably overwhelming. Then Mary's medical provider, Healthcare for the Homeless, referred her to Care Review in Durham and her story began to change.

As part of Durham's Adult System of Care, Care Review is a process designed to connect people with multiple needs to social, mental health and substance abuse services, job training, stable housing, essential health care and proper discharge planning from the hospitals or jail. The Care Review Team is made up of community agencies and organizations that have expertise and access to resources in each of the critical life areas that are necessary to help people recover, including financial stability, education and employment opportunities, physical and mental health care, help with a substance use disorder, help navigating the legal and court systems, spiritual counseling, and housing assistance. Also joining the Team are members of a person's individual support system, like family members and trusted friends, who are invested in helping the person meet their goals for recovery.

Care Review Teams made up of professionals with specialized expertise are also available to address veteran's issues, situations involving domestic violence, issues with the legal system, disability, and the unique problems faced by the elderly. A critical part of the Care Review process is developing a plan that not only helps people access needed resources but that offers hope and optimism that difficult life circumstances can and will improve.

Within a month of her Care Review, Mary was set up in safe, stable housing with rental assistance from The Durham Center and Durham Department of Social Services. Donations of furniture as well as basic household and personal needs came from local churches, businesses and community members. She was connected with a church that has started to check in with her on a regular basis. Members of the Care Review Team also helped obtain additional documentation from Mary's physicians to support her appeal for disability benefits, and her attorney recently presented these documents to the judge at her hearing. At last, she looks to her future with optimism.

Care Review is just one piece of the larger efforts of Durham Adult System of Care. Our goal is to develop a comprehensive and coordinated system that allows for timely access to needed services and supports. Too often people in crisis or with urgent situations have difficulty navigating complex and fragmented systems. This prevents them from getting the help they need when they need it, resulting in more expensive services and poorer outcomes.

Collaboration, as seen in Care Reviews, is at the heart of a strong System of Care where committed partners, like Durham Police Department, Durham County Health Department, Lincoln Community Health Center and many others, work together to bridge the gaps with the common purpose of improving care to our most vulnerable citizens. The ultimate goal is for Durham to offer its citizens a recovery-oriented system so that all people will be empowered to live, work and participate fully in our community.

Like each of us, Mary deserves that.

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The Partnership for a Healthy Durham is the Healthy Carolinians planning team for Durham and serves as the Health Committee for the City and County's Results-Based Accountability initiative. The Mental Health committee is responsible for this article. For more information on the Partnership, see www.healthydurham.org or call 560-7833.