

\$5 million in funding aims to employ mentally ill

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DAYTON — More than \$5 million in federal grant money, spread over five years, will be coming to local and state organizations in Montgomery County to help people with severe mental illness find meaningful employment.

The Montgomery County Pathways Two project involves three major service providers working together to design and carry out the effort — the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board for Montgomery County, the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission, and Goodwill Easter Seals Miami Valley.

"This is the first comprehensive collaboration among these agencies and it provides an exciting opportunity to serve transition youth and adults with severe mental illness," said Amy Luttrell, president of Goodwill Easter Seals.

The \$1 million annual funding is contingent upon officials proving each year that certain objectives have been met, Goodwill Easter Seals spokeswoman Mari Jo Sellers noted. The dollars will come through the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission, which was able to draw the grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration inside the U.S. Department of Education.

Starting in September, the project will serve people ages 18 to 22 with severe mental health disorders in transition from school to work, as well as adults with severe mental illness, with a focus on veterans.

The project will benefit 150 individuals in the first year and 250 annually after that, Sellers said.

In addition to helping them find jobs, it will create an interagency service and support system called Community Care Conferences to optimize outcomes for youths by addressing their needs.

It also will improve access of students with disabilities to public post-secondary programs, such as Sinclair Community College. The project has established a link with Sinclair's Supportive Education Program to help students with disabilities access the assistive technology and supportive services to successfully complete their training and secure a job.

Joseph Szoke, executive director of the ADAMHS Board, said giving at-risk youth and adults with mental illness access to quality of services "can drastically affect an individual's life and move them from just surviving to thriving."

Other agencies providing referrals, services and support include Samaritan Behavioral Health, South Community, Daybreak, Sinclair's Supportive Education and Fast Forward programs, and the Montgomery County Children Services.

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