

**OMHSAS EDUCATION PLUS PROJECT
2007/08 PROJECT EXPANSION
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS**

Introduction

As part of the recovery initiative outlined in the OMHSAS' publication "A Call For Change," OMHSAS has identified the need for educational opportunities for individuals with a psychiatric disability to enter college and successfully complete a degree program. To this end, the Office recognizes a supported education program at Horizon House in Philadelphia, called Education Plus, as a model program for replication. Education Plus provides a variety of supports to individuals attending college that helps them remain in school and achieve their dreams of obtaining a college education leading to a career. This program achieves outstanding outcomes and has been recognized with several awards. The purpose of this RFP is to identify one (1) county or joinder, who wishes to develop a similar supported education program using Education Plus as a model. Staff and students of the Horizon House Education Plus program will provide OMHSAS funded technical assistance and training to help develop and implement this program.

Description of the Education Plus Program

The philosophy of Education Plus is to offer services that are individualized and normalizing, and that emphasize integration within the regular college environment. The program provides educational specialists who offer individualized supports in three areas, to adults attending Philadelphia area colleges and certificate programs: 1) personal supports on issues that affect the student's ability to attend school including family issues, psychiatric and medical problems, housing, and linkages to other services; 2) academic supports including assistance with course selection, study habits and time management, completion of financial aid applications, anxiety around test taking and deadlines for assignments, dealing with faculty, and the use of the Disabilities Office and accommodations on the campus; and 3) campus life issues including forming and maintaining relationships, the facilitation of campus resources, and leisure activities. The educational specialists do not duplicate services already being offered by the various colleges, but rather encourage students to use them. The educational specialists make a concerted effort to develop relationships and partner with college personnel in various departments including the disabilities office, learning supports offices, and financial aid departments. The supportive services listed above are offered at a location convenient for the student, most often on the college campus.

Staffing

The Education Plus Program at Horizon house is staffed by 1 full time and 1 part-time educational specialist (ES) who report to the Director of Employment

Services. There are currently 48 students enrolled representing 8 – 10 colleges or universities in the area. The educational specialists are available by cell phone Monday-Friday during business hours or by special arrangement. The majority of their time is spent out of the office at the various campuses.

Student Entrance Criteria and Procedure

Entrance criteria include: a documented psychiatric disability, which may include a letter from a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist; current enrollment in a post secondary school program; at least 18 years of age; free from substances for the past 6 months; and a strong desire to obtain a career in a chosen field. Each potential candidate meets with an ES and completes an application packet that includes demographic information, history of the disability, a list of current supports, (e.g. family members, physicians, or mental health providers), and a short essay question on why they want to go to college. Students are assigned to an ES with whom they will have either face-to-face or phone contact at least bi-weekly. The student and the ES formulate an Educational Plan outlining the goals the student wishes to achieve and what strategies will be used to achieve them. Support is available throughout the time the student attends a post-secondary school program.

Program Activities

Students are encouraged to attend a peer support group. During the group students share their experiences, lend and/or gain support from each other, or gain information on a special topic. The group meets either weekly or bi-weekly depending upon the preferences of the students. The group is facilitated by either an ES or a student. The students plan for speakers and topics to be discussed. During summer breaks, the group attends social activities or visits attractions in the area.

At the end of each fall semester the support group sponsors a celebration for both currently enrolled students and individuals considering entering the program. Students choose the menu and the agenda for the celebration. At the end of each academic year, a large celebration is held at a college campus to recognize the students' accomplishments, particularly those who have graduated and/or have obtained jobs.

Outcomes

Since the program began, outcome data has been collected including grade point averages for each semester, attendance, retention rates, how many classes were completed versus how many classes were taken, and psychological outcomes that are gathered from an instrument developed by a consultant from the University of Pennsylvania.

Addition to the Model

The purpose of the Education Plus Program is to help students retain enrollment in a post secondary school program. Therefore, participants must be enrolled in school prior to beginning the program. The new program to be developed will also include a component to assist individuals to access post secondary education. This component includes:

- College orientation
- Identification of financial aid and completion of applications, linkages to employment
- Completion of college entrance applications
- College preparation, e.g. study habits, time management, writing skills

Technical Assistance Plan

Staff from the Horizon House Education Plus Program, along with students from the program, a representative from an area college, and a consultant from the University of Pennsylvania, will provide the site and the county with a series of onsite trainings and conference calls over approximately a one-year period. Together, the team will establish a model program based upon Education Plus that fits the needs of the local community. Also, a plan will be developed to track outcome measures and the effectiveness of the program. The technical assistance team in conjunction with the agency or entity implementing the program will develop a schedule of activities.

At the end of the year, it is expected that a minimum of 10 students will be attending post secondary education and enrolled in the supported education program.

Applicant Qualifications

Eligible Counties

All county MH/MR Offices in partnership with a local community college, college(s) or universities are eligible to apply

OMHSAS in partnership with Horizon House will provide technical assistance and training to facilitate the development and implementation of one (1) Education Plus model supported education program beginning in FY 2007/08.

Education Plus model programs currently exist in Philadelphia and Berks Counties

Applicants need to provide the following:

- A. Financial resources to provide the following:
 - Site for training sessions and refreshments
 - Salary for minimally 1 full time position for 2 years
 - Office space to house the program
 - Staff travel expenses
 - Desk, Office supplies, telephone, pager or cell phone, copy machine, etc.
 - Two computers – for student use for example: to complete FAFSA applications, do information searches and look for part-time jobs

- B. Demonstrate that they have a network of stakeholders committed to the project. Stakeholders should include:
 - Representatives from a local community college, college(s) or university
 - Representative from the County Office of Mental Health
 - Individual(s) who would use the service
 - Local OVR office
 - Family members of individuals who would use the service
 - Local business person
 - Providers of educational programs such as literacy or Adult Basic Education

- C. An established relationship with a local college.

- D. A plan for continued funding and long term sustainability.

- E. Willingness to participate in future data collection and outcomes

