

**FINAL REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES  
OF THE ETHEL AND JAMES FLINN FAMILY FOUNDATION**

**Project:** Continuation of the *Life Skills* Program: Providing Quality Psychosocial Education and Support to the Chronically Mentally Ill in Michigan

**Grant Period:** July 1, 2004 – July 1, 2005; no cost extension through September 30, 2005

**Investigators:** Mona Goldman, Ph.D. and Nancy Mann, BSN, R.N.

**Date:** November 29, 2005

Since December 1997 the Ethel and James Flinn Family Foundation has generously underwritten the development and implementation of *Life Skills*, a community-based psychosocial skills training program for persons with severe mental illness. The growth of the *Life Skills* program has paralleled an increased recognition by mental health professionals that rehabilitation and recovery are attainable goals for individuals with severe mental illnesses, and that psychosocial skills programs such as *Life Skills* play an important role in achieving those goals. The purpose of this Flinn grant was to allow us to continue providing *Life Skills* classes at diverse sites in southeastern Michigan and to assist the *Life Skills* program as it transitions to independent, self-sustaining status. In this report we review our activities in fulfilling those goals and briefly summarize our accomplishments over the past seven years.

**Provision of Classes**

The *Life Skills* program was designed to be flexible enough to meet administrative and clinical needs in diverse community-based program settings. An important goal, therefore, has been to implement the classes in a wide variety of facilities. Funding from this grant allowed us to continue to offer the *Life Skills* program at the Full Circle drop-in center; the Fresh Start clubhouse; the Meds-Plus outpatient clinic; and Chidester, a subsidized apartment building that houses many individuals recovering from mental illnesses; and to introduce the program at the Delonis Homeless Shelter in Ann Arbor. (The classes at Delonis complement the services provided there by the Project Outreach Team (PORT), a program that has received substantial support from the Flinn Foundation.) We are now completing our fourth set of classes at the shelter. Without additional funding, however, we could offer only three sets of classes at Chidester.

Last year we had the opportunity to conduct *Life Skills* classes at the W. J. Maxey Boys Training School in Whitmore Lake. Maxey provides residential therapeutic treatment for offenders between the ages of 12 and 21. Those selected for Life Skills classes also had a diagnosis of a severe mental illness (with many having a co-occurring substance use disorder). The *Life Skills* protocol was adapted to conform to the administrative structure and educational programming at Maxey. Two groups of boys were selected to participate. Each group attended classes that were offered daily, rather than weekly, for sixteen weeks. Furthermore, nearly a week was spent on each topic, and students were tested on the material every four weeks. Based on comments from the administration and students, the classes were useful and enjoyable. Furthermore, the experience demonstrated that *Life Skills* could be delivered successfully in a more intensive and extensive manner. Maxey staff requested that we return as consultants to assist Maxey teachers who would be teaching the classes. However, although Maxey paid for the first set of classes, they did not have funding to pay for a consultant.

### **Becoming a Self-Sustaining Program**

We have now taught *Life Skills* classes in more than 15 mental health settings in southeastern Michigan. Although every site has requested that the classes be continued at the end of each session, no site has had the funds to pay for additional classes. In fact, with the exception of Maxey, all classes have been underwritten by the Flinn Foundation. These funds allowed us to offer the *Life Skills* program at some sites for many years (e.g., Full Circle, Meds-Plus), while classes at other sites had to be discontinued after just a few sets of classes (e.g., Maxey, Kadima, Chidester). The difficult decision on where to conduct classes and when to discontinue them is based on several factors that include the needs of clients, the number of clients at a site, current funding resources, and scheduling efficiencies. When our current funding ends in December 2005, we will have to discontinue programming at the four current sites (Full Circle, Fresh Start, Meds-Plus clinic, and the Delonis shelter) and we have informed them of this. To illustrate community response to the *Life Skills* program, we have attached examples of emails that were received recently.

One of the most frustrating aspects of working on *Life Skills* has been our inability to garner sustainable funding for the program; specifically, to obtain payment from insurers. Ultimately this will require additional research to demonstrate the value of social skills training and allow us to make the case to third party payers for including such programs as a covered benefit. We believe that our own studies (including the latest at Rose Hill), along with large multi-site trials

such as the ongoing national evaluation of psychosocial skills training sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services/Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (DHHS/SAMHSA), will provide the necessary evidence. Until that happens, however, we are working on other approaches to assure continuation of the *Life Skills* program. For example, after visiting a class with Nancy Mann, the Director of Worldwide Outcomes Research at Pfizer Inc. invited the *Life Skills* team to present the program to a group of company executives in New York and Ann Arbor in December. We hope we can interest Pfizer in funding additional research. We are also talking to clinicians in our own department and at the Ann Arbor Veterans Administration Medical Center about incorporating *Life Skills* into ongoing programs such as the UM inpatient unit and the VA post-traumatic stress disorders clinic.

### **Accomplishments of Life Skills**

Since the first classes began at the New Focus clubhouse and the Full Circle drop-in center in 1999, the *Life Skills* staff has taught over 600 individuals (see Table). The *Life Skills* program package has also been purchased by over 30 mental health agencies in 14 states and in four foreign countries. Most recently, *Life Skills* course materials were purchased for implementation by Dr. Alan Bellack, University of Maryland School of Medicine, one of the pioneers in the field of psychosocial rehabilitation in schizophrenia (Bellack AS, Mueser KT, et al. *Social Skills Training for Schizophrenia: a Step-by-Step Guide*. NY: The Guilford Press, 1997; Bellack AS. Skills training for people with severe mental illness. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* 2004;27:375-391). In addition, this year *Life Skills* course materials, including teacher and client workbooks, were translated into Dutch. Finally, *Life Skills* was selected for presentation as an innovative program by the Institute on Psychiatric Services (October 2002); was the subject of an article in the Ann Arbor News (“Life Skills Meet Needs, Fill Voids,” May 11, 2003); and was presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) in September 2004.

We have written an article and submitted it for publication. It was returned for revisions, which we are now completing and will submit it again.

### **Conclusion**

We are very grateful to the Flinn Foundation for providing the funding to develop and implement the *Life Skills* program. Hundreds of individuals with schizophrenia and other severe mental illnesses have participated in, and been helped, by the classes. There is now a growing

recognition that psychosocial rehabilitation programs such as Life Skills are necessary components of a multifactor treatment approach that can lead to rehabilitation and recovery for individuals with severe mental illnesses. We believe that ongoing studies such as the DHHHS/SAMHSA multisite trial of psychosocial skills training will provide conclusive evidence for the effectiveness of this approach and will lead private and governmental payers to include these programs as benefits for subscribers.

**TABLE: CLASSES TAUGHT BY *LIFE SKILLS* STAFF**

<b>Site</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b># groups</b>	<b># students</b>
<b>Washtenaw County</b>			
New Focus	Clubhouse	10	80
Full Circle	Drop-in Center	14	121
Meds-Plus*	Outpatient Clinic	15	83
Fresh Start	Clubhouse	10	90
VA, Ann Arbor, MI.	Outpatient Clinic	1	10
VA. Ann Arbor IPPC	Assertive Community Treatment team	1	8
Chidester Apts.	Subsidized housing	3	27
Miller Manor Apts.	Subsidized housing	1	14
Baker Commons Apts.	Subsidized housing	1	13
Delonis Shelter	Homeless Shelter	4	17
<b>Other Counties in MI</b>			
Rose Hill	Residential	9	145
Kadima	Clinic and Group home	3	24
Oakland County Center	Drop-in center	1	28
Maxey	Boys Training Center	2	19
			<b>Total: 679</b>

\* The Meds-Plus clinic was originally held in the Riverview clinic building and is now at the Commonwealth Center. These names have appeared in previous reports.

## EXAMPLES OF e-MAILS

### From Ellen Schulmeister, Executive Director, Shelter Association of Washtenaw County

**From:** Ellen Schulmeister <ellenschule@yahoo.com>  
**To:** Mona Goldman <mgoldman@med.umich.edu>  
**Date:** 11/20/2005 7:00:14 PM  
**Subject:** Re: Life Skills classes to end

Hi Mona - it is with a very sad heart that I recieved this news. I am sorry that our efforts to assist in fund raising did not pan out. If there is anything we can do, let me know. I deeply appreciated having the program here at the Delonis Center and it was of great value to those who attended. Thanks for all you have done.  
Ellen

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### From Larry Galligan, Health Supervisor, Washtenaw County Community Support and Treatment Services

**From:** "Larry Galligan" <galligal@ewashtenaw.org>  
**To:** "Mona Goldman" <mgoldman@med.umich.edu>  
**Date:** 11/17/2005 5:35:27 PM  
**Subject:** RE: Life Skills classes to end

This is sad news indeed for everyone about wonderful people and a wonderful program but I will continue to hope for a rebirth of LS in future new dawns of integrated health.

Larry Galligan

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### From Dr. Elaine Pitt, Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry (Note: Identifying information has been removed for privacy purposes.)

**From:** Elaine Pitt  
**To:** Greden, John; Silk, Ken  
**Date:** 9/21/2005 3:16:18 PM  
**Subject:** Life Skills Program

John, I recently learned that funding for the program at Commonwealth is about to end. I recently had an experience with it that prompts me to urge you, as strongly as I can, to see that this does not happen. I evaluted [a person] with a life long chronic and serious psychiatric illness. .... A serious component missing from the treatment plan was developing life skills. I spent hours calling all over this institution and town without being able to find anything suitable. I was finally referred to Nancy Mann who immediately saw what was needed and was willing to tailor a program for the patient with good results so far. It would be a terrible loss to lose this resource.

Elaine