

Address to City of Stamford Social Services Commission

by Linda M. Autore, President and CEO, Laurel House, Inc.

April 12, 2016

Overview of Agency and Services

Laurel House provides resources and opportunities for individuals living with mental illness to lead fulfilling and productive lives in their communities. We are headquartered in Stamford but serve eight towns in Fairfield County, delivering a robust array of integrated services (“Resources to Recover”) to help individuals and their families achieve and sustain mental health recovery. We follow a recovery model of care which holds that people with serious mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression, anxiety) can have an improved quality of life, greater self-sufficiency and engagement in their local communities. Our program participants have a diagnosis of serious mental illness, are typically low income and qualify for services through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). 64.2% of our funding for our operations and programs last year came from DMHAS and other public funding sources such as HUD (for some of our Housing). 35.8% of our revenues were privately raised.

The goals of Resources to Recover are: early intervention and remediation; social inclusion; and recovery. To accomplish these goals, Laurel House focuses on 3 objectives: move outbound into the community (reaching program participants where they live, work, go to school and socialize); broaden the client base of those served (to reach young adults as early as possible and to assist families seeking expert guidance in next steps for appropriate care); build a sustainable service organization.

Our Resource Center (1616 Washington Blvd., Stamford) is the hub for the delivery of integrated, evidence-based programs and services including: Supported Employment; Supported Education; Thinking Well (Cognitive Remediation); Psychosocial Rehabilitation; Life Skills Workshops in Writing, Art and Cooking; Food Service; Social Events and Outreach. We provide Housing and Residential Services in our properties at 4 and 6 Washington Court and in scattered sites across Stamford owned by other landlords. Laurel House also helps families connect with best-practice mental health treatment programs and providers through our gateway website, www.rtor.org, with personalized service available by phone and email request. We also operate a thrift store, called Treasure Hunters (501 Summer Street) where program participants can learn vocational skills, working side by side with staff and community volunteers, plus benefit from highly discounted or free goods.

We are regularly outbound meeting current and future clients in the community. This is critical to the success of our Supported Education and Supported Employment programs. We host monthly dinners in the community for the employed or those seeking employment. We provide onsite service at Norwalk Community College (where we have an office) and meet students at the local universities of their choice (currently working with 16 different universities and post-secondary programs) as well as certain high schools such as Greenwich where we receive additional Supported Education program funding as one of the Department of Social Services’ Community Partners.

Programs and Services Available to 18 – 25 Year Olds

During FY 2015 (ending June 30, 2015), Laurel House served 729 program participants (including 466 Stamford residents) from ages 17 to 84 and 150 families. Of those individuals, 81 are among the ages of 18 - 25 and 38 of those 81 young adults are Stamford residents.

Following are the programs and services in which the young adults participated:

Supported Education provides the skill building and coping skills for individuals living with mental illness so they can reach their full potential and reintegrate into the community with renewed confidence. Where possible we intervene as early as possible so the most debilitating effects of mental illness can be reduced. The evidence-based program assists participants in choosing a school or certification program, applying for admission and financial aid, selecting and enrolling in classes, accessing on campus supports for disability services, tutoring and writing centers and counseling services. In FY 15 Laurel House provided Supported Education Services to 77 participants. 51 enrolled in colleges (45), vocational training (4), and vocational schools (2). 23 of those Supported Education participants are 18 - 25 and 12 of the 23 young adults are Stamford residents.

Supported Employment is also an evidence-based program that assists individuals with severe mental illness in getting and retaining competitive jobs of their choosing. The model was developed and continues to be assessed and tracked by the Dartmouth Psychiatric Research Center. Laurel House's program was ranked #1 among all 31 CT Community Rehabilitation Providers and was presented the Commissioner's Recognition Award for achieving the highest rate of employment. Of the 181 program participants in Supported and Independent Employment programs last year, 163 were employed. 16 of the participants in the Supported Employment program are 18 – 25 and 8 of those are Stamford residents.

Thinking Well (Cognitive Remediation): Considered a strategic initiative by Laurel House, Thinking Well is completely funded by private grants and individuals donors. Our staff was trained and certified in cognitive remediation by Dr. Alice Medalia, Director of the Lieber Recovery Clinic in NYC. We are 1 of only 3 facilities in CT with the evidence-based therapeutic program that significantly improves client functioning in daily tasks, at work, in school, at home and in the community. (The other two locations are the Institute of Living in Hartford and the VA in New Haven, but both of those are in hospital settings and not community based, integrated with other services as Laurel House's program is.)

Thinking Well focuses on direct improvement of attention, working memory, verbal learning, visual learning, problem solving and reasoning. Thinking Well helps remove the barriers to employment, education and independent living. It is attractive to young adults due to the use of "computer games." The program does not seem like mental health services since the discussion (bridging) group that is a part of each of the 30 sessions makes practical applications to real life of what was done in the computer exercises. 72 individuals participated in the Thinking Well program last year; 8 of those are in the 18 – 25 age group and 4 of those are Stamford residents.

Psychosocial Rehabilitation, Life Skills Workshops and Food Service:

Of the Workshops available to all program participants, young adults most often participated in the weekly Writers Workshop or Young Adult Discussion/Events Groups offered on a periodic basis. Several attended the weekly Artists Workshop or participated in Cooking Workshops. Some use food service if they are scheduled for a Thinking Well session before or after lunch or are attending the Writers Workshop in the afternoon, but generally young adults do not visit the Resource Center for lunch but use it more for coffee and snacks before or after sessions. When we offer special free events that include a meal (such as some upcoming musical events in May during Mental Health Awareness Month or a picnic in Scalzi Park), then we get more young adult attendance.

www.rtor.org: One of our two strategic initiatives, www.rtor.org (the letters stand for Resources to Recover), is a gateway website that provides guidance, support and best practice resources for recovery-oriented mental health care to families affected by mental illness. It is a completely privately funded program created to: demystify the maze of mental health alternatives; shorten the painful cycle of discovery of mental health issues and treatments; and improve recovery outcomes. We promote the need for early intervention and remediation, showcase family-endorsed providers and treatments, and dedicate expert, caring Resource Specialists to provide voice to voice clinical support for site visitors.

Providing easy access to the right mental health services is critical to prevent harmful effects of mental illness. Since rtor.org is a resource that can be accessed in the privacy and comfort of one's own home and is free, one is more likely to refer to it and gain a better understanding of mental illness. Less than one-third of adults and one-half of children with a diagnosable mental disorder receive mental health services in a given year, but with proper care and treatment 70-90% experience significant reduction in symptoms and improved quality of life.

The creation of our rtor.org website has connected us with over 105,000 unique visitors – some in our public funding catchment area and others from across CT and the northeastern region (which is our target audience), as well as locations across the country and around the world. We support the site with a Resource Specialist, an experienced Licensed Clinical Social Worker who responds to requests for help by email and by phone. 331 cases have been addressed by the Resource Specialist since June of 2015. Many of those cases are inquiries by a family member and often the person in need of help himself or herself.

Successes & Failures in Service to Young Adults:

Supported Education, Thinking Well and Supported Employment participants have had the best success in achieving their respective recovery goals for the programs. Thinking Well requires (per above description of program) a commitment of 2 sessions a weeks for up to 30 sessions and during that time the participants are gaining self-confidence and a feeling of achievement of milestones.

Common factors of success in these programs:

- The routine established requires next steps but also more opportunities for intervals of encouragement regarding progress and timely remediation when needed;
- Specific assistance given as needed, such as a specialized volunteer tutor to help get the young adult through difficult portions of course work (e.g., math, writing, test taking);

- Accommodations made by disability offices on campus due to liaison of Laurel House counselors advocating for individuals;
- Some barriers to employment, education and housing are removed by client financial assistance provided by Laurel House such as: paying for text books; appropriate and/or set of clothing for work or school; bus or train pass; security deposit.

In general, the following attributes characterize the experience of the young adults who do not complete their stated recovery goals for the respective program:

- Feeling that they are “done” or have “done enough” to feel that they mastered whatever the skill development might be;
- Lack of follow through, not showing up (despite continued encouragement, including text and phone call reminders and outreach to ensure the individual is doing okay);
- Abuse of substance which prevents them from continuing effectively in a program;
- Psychiatric relapse or distress (causing isolation or withdrawal).

Additional Resources To Benefit Young Adults:

- Spanish speaking counselor would not only help in supporting some of our clients but would likely draw additional referrals once residents became aware of this capability;
- Priority for young adults to get housing vs CT only prioritizing chronically homeless;
- 24/7 supervision in a residential building; does not need to be young adult only facility but would need that level of supervision to ensure success of some of the young adults.
- Structured activities including physical fitness, yoga, hiking, camping, not just sports.

resources to recover





Mission

Laurel House provides resources and opportunities for people living with mental illness to lead fulfilling and productive lives in their communities throughout Fairfield County.

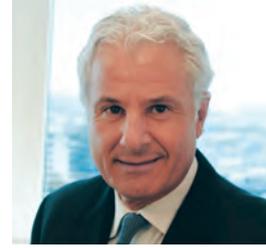
Core Purpose

Early Intervention and Remediation,
Social Inclusion and Recovery

Goals

Move outbound into the community.
Broaden the client base of those served.
Build a sustainable service organization.

Thank you to all the individuals and families who have shown their confidence in Laurel House's programs and services over the last 31 years. Nothing is more gratifying than sharing in the celebration of program participants' accomplishments along their paths to mental health recovery or seeing those we serve productively engage in their local communities.



Thanks also to our many generous donors who have helped us sustain and expand our programs and services and to our volunteers who lend their time and special talents to conducting Artists' and Writers' Workshops, tutoring in our Supported Education Program, making a welcoming environment in the Treasure Hunters Thrift Store and preparing and serving meals in our Resource Center kitchen.

This Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2015 (ending June 30, 2015) focuses on last year's milestones and accomplishments that together the Laurel House team (including our volunteers) and our program participants have achieved. However some of the simplest, but most profound outcomes, are not as easily captured in the service measurements herein. You can see tangible results of our programs in this report – securing meaningful employment; returning to and succeeding in school; attaining an undergraduate or graduate degree or vocational certification; living independently in safe, affordable housing. But it's harder to glean the equally life-altering accomplishments of our participants who now can: engage in a conversation; stay focused and attentive on a project; make their own doctor's appointments; navigate public transportation; rekindle or discover a talent in art or writing; learn to cook. The results also can't effectively portray all of the "alumni" who have been helped over the years and continue to connect with Laurel House as a touchstone for their long term mental health recovery and acceptance in local communities.

In the year ahead we will continue our dedication to evidence-based, results producing programs such as Supported Employment, Supported Education and Supported Housing that program participants and their families have come to expect of Laurel House. But we will also sustain our focus on and growth of two initiatives launched in the spring of 2014 – Thinking Well (cognitive remediation) and www.rtor.org, a gateway website to best practice and family-endorsed resources for mental health recovery available in the northeast. A particular focus of these services is the engagement of young adults, increasing our opportunity to intervene early and, where possible, prevent the most debilitating effects of mental illness. Please visit both the Resources to Recover website and the Laurel House website, www.laurelhouse.net, to learn more about these innovative programs and to see the "Connecting Families" video as well as the "Thinking Well" video posted on both sites.

Thanks again for your continued confidence in our services and our team!

Linda M. Autore
President and CEO

Kenneth A. DellaRocco, Esq.
Chairman, Board of Directors

Resources to Recover's new website www.rtor.org had a great first year following its launch in May 2014.

This gateway website offers families and individuals guidance, support and information on the best practices and providers in recovery-oriented mental health care. In our first year of service, among the 40,371 unique visitors to our site, 321 individuals and 80 families requested and received personalized assistance from our Resource Specialists.

Following is a sample of the types of calls requesting help that we receive on a regular basis:

- A single mother of a 19-year-old girl with multiple mental health issues who was having trouble accessing adequate services from her remote rural community.
- An elderly woman who needed help with her adult son who was in acute crisis due to his bipolar disorder.
- A successful professional who has been immobilized by depression after leaving a high-pressure position in the business world.

The focus for these services is regional and in fiscal year 2015 more than half the families we assisted were based in Connecticut. However, as a website our reach is global and we routinely receive requests for help from across the country. In these instances, our Resource Specialists point users in the direction of services and information resources in their communities. With the addition of a full time Licensed Clinical Social Worker to our RtoR team in July 2015 we can now provide even more expert clinical assistance in the coming year. There are no charges for these services. The central feature of the website is our Directory of Family-Endorsed Providers, an online resource that helps families connect with the best mental health services and providers in Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts. Participating providers are recommended by families and individuals who have used their services, and are vetted by RtoR staff and members of the RtoR Advisory Group.

Thank you to **The Community Fund of Darien** and **New Canaan Community Foundation** for their funding of a portion of the resource specialist's salary; **Google Ad Grants** for free monthly advertising on Google search result pages; **Oak Foundation** for its significant 2 year grant, allowing dedication of resource and improvements of site capability.



First Year Accomplishments

Unique users of the site: **40,371** Social media impressions: **112,338**

People who requested and received personalized help: **321**

Families helped: **80** CT Users Helped: **261**

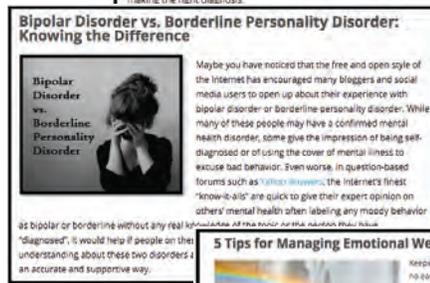
Other helpful information resources on rtor.org include:

- Our regularly updated mental health blog, which was visited by thousands of users last year
- A Share Your Story section where users post their inspiring personal stories of hope and recovery
- Content-rich information pages on mental health conditions and the treatments and services to address them



Help rtor.org grow:

- Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest
- Subscribe to email updates from the blog
- Regularly visit the website and comment on our posts



The Resources to Recover Team:



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Veronique Hoebeke, Associate Editor
 Veronique is a media critic, wellness blogger and new media specialist who manages rtor.org's online presence and uses her Psychology degree and interest in mental health to create content for the website. vhoebeke@laurelhouse.net (203) 487-1622



Denise Vestuti, Resource Specialist
 Denise is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) experienced in helping, supporting and empowering families and individuals affected by mental health conditions with recovery-oriented approaches. dvestuti@laurelhouse.net (203) 487-1633

Some startling facts:

- 60 – 80% of people living with mental illness are unemployed and for those with the most serious mental illness unemployment rates are as high as 90%.
- The U.S. Department of Education reports that over 50% of students with a mental disorder age 14 and older drop out of high school – the highest dropout rate of any disability group. According to the American Journal of Psychiatry, individuals with the least amount of education have the highest rates of unemployment. Individuals who have not completed their high school education are impacted at nearly twice the rate (14.6%) of the general population (7.9%).

So those living with mental illness and cognitive impairment have both a hard time learning skills needed to succeed and thrive in their chosen environments and a distinct disadvantage in the workplace, school and living in the community. Laurel House's two long-standing, evidence-based programs in Supported Employment and Supported Education successfully help program participants obtain and keep competitive, meaningful employment. Participants also succeed in courses, or attain a degree or certification and access on-campus support systems. Both programs are funded by the State of Connecticut's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). That funding is augmented by private donors and grants which allow Laurel House to: add resource to reduce client wait lists/increase caseload; support the cost of clinical training and professional development for skilled staff; and help close the gap in market compensation for staff.

Supported Employment:

- 181 participants
- 163 employed in independent and supported jobs
- Monthly Supported Employment and Education community dinners



Supported Education:

- 77 participants
- 51 enrolled in: colleges (45); vocational training (4) and vocational schools (2)
- Course/program completion rate: 80%
- Collaboration with 16 colleges and universities



Thank you **Greenwich Department of Social Services** for designating Laurel House as a Community Partner and providing sustained support to expand Supported Education in Greenwich; **Appleby Charitable Trust** for its funding of staff skill development and education; **Max J. and Winnie S. Rosenshein Foundation** for funding operating costs.

Thank you to the many donors who invite us into their homes to pick up their gently used furniture.

Proceeds from the sale of the Treasure Hunters Thrift Store goods support the store operation and Laurel House programs. The Thrift Store is located at 501 Summer Street in downtown Stamford; its truck picks up donated goods during scheduled appointments.

Sometimes we get truly special treasures among the donated goods. Recently our Store Manager, Geno Lupinacci, was unpacking some donated goods from a senior living home and discovered a shoe box with letters dated 1953, postmarked from Noroton, CT and addressed to San Francisco, CA. Geno contacted the daughter of the woman who had written the letters and learned that they were love letters with great meaning to the family. Geno was delighted to return the letters to the family.



"We decorated our new home almost completely from Laurel House's Thrift Store at a fraction of the cost and it looks amazing. I can't recall what made my wife and I first go into the store; we like to say it was divine intervention. Geno and the rest of the crew at Treasure Hunters are truly exceptional people with incredible heart. Laurel House is a great cause!" - Peter and Jessica Chichester



volunteers

Laurel House's volunteers speak of the reward and gratification they experience in their roles supporting the Treasure Hunters' thrift store operation, food service, tutoring and specialized skill development.

Laurel House program participants remark on the dedication and sensitivity of our talented team of volunteers and the affirmation and acceptance they receive in interacting with the volunteers. Our programs could not succeed without this assistance and the personal engagement with program participants.



Chitra Ramcharandas
Power of One Award Winner



Betsy Varian
2014 Stamford Outstanding Established Adult
Volunteer Award by United Way of Western CT



Esperanza "Eppie" Eilets
Preparing clothing at Treasure Hunters

Thank you First County Bank Foundation for continuing to support our infrastructure projects, when few grant opportunities exist for funding operational needs. The FY15 funding was for a Resource Center phone system.

88 residents received housing and support services: coaching for Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), case management, goal planning and budgeting assistance

Safe, stable and affordable housing is critical to effectively address the mental health needs of those living with serious mental illness. The price of Fairfield County's rental market is among the highest nationally and the cost of living is the highest in the state. Despite this challenge, Laurel House provides affordable and safe housing, supported with critical services that make independent living and mental health recovery possible.

Laurel House owns two buildings on Washington Ct. in Stamford in which residents live. Residential counselors provide case management for those residents and also for tenants throughout the community who live in apartments managed by other landlords. All Resource Center services and programs are made available to residents of Laurel House properties as well as tenants in other landlords' properties throughout the area.



Housing residents enjoy a Saturday at Calf Pasture Beach and a day at Playland.

food service and wellness

Among the most welcoming aspects of Laurel House is the hospitality and warmth of food service, the Cooking Workshop and volunteers who help to engage participants in the program.

People with behavioral health problems often live in poverty, experience social isolation and food insecurity and have compromised physical health which negatively affects their mental health and quality of life. Laurel House's Café offers social engagement, affordable or free nutritious snacks and meals, social events and the opportunity to learn skills to increase self-sufficiency.



Volunteers, Marcy Kurzman and Nancy Fahey, prepare Cinco de Mayo luncheon.

- Cooking Workshops
- Commercial Kitchen and Café
- Social dinners, picnics, events
- Outreach to Isolated Individuals



Thank you **Gordon Family Foundation** for funding weekend outings for Laurel House housing residents; **Greenwich Community Development Block Grant** for residential bathrooms renovation; **First Congregational Church of Greenwich, Near & Far Aid** and **New Canaan Sewing Group** for funding food service operating costs, making nutritious fare and free dining possible.

The goal of Thinking Well is to improve quality of life, increase self-confidence and to help people living with mental illness become more participative members of their local communities.

The program is designed to address the long-term cognitive impairment that interferes with the daily functioning of people living with serious mental illness. People with cognitive disorders score below 85% of the population on a wide range of cognitive tests.

Many of the adverse outcomes associated with mental illness such as the inability to hold a job, homelessness, or social isolation can be traced to cognitive impairment. Thinking Well focuses on specific areas of thought: attention; working memory; verbal learning; visual learning; reasoning and problem solving; speed of processing. The program uses instructor led computer based drills and exercises followed by “bridging” discussion groups to practice and improve thinking skills and to draw real-world benefit from the exercises.



Morris Mendes completed Thinking Well, joined the Supported Employment Program and is a Thinking Well Peer Leader.

Cognitive Domain	Real-World Example*
Attention	Being able to read a book or pay attention to a movie
Working Memory	Remembering a phone number just given to you
Verbal Learning	Remembering the items someone told you to purchase at the supermarket
Visual Learning	Remembering where you put something in a closet
Reasoning & Problem Solving	Arriving for work on time even though your bus schedule has changed
Speed of Processing	Using a touch-screen computer to serve customers at a fast food restaurant

*Adapted from Current Psychiatry.com/Cognition White Paper: Cognitive Impairment in Schizophrenia

With rare exception, there has been clinically observed improvement in functional skills in nearly all of the 72 program participants in the Thinking Well program in FY 2015. These visible improvements range from getting a job, volunteering, going back to school or taking on more hours at work to living independently or engaging better socially due to greater understanding of social cues.

Thank you to donors whose support has sustained this privately funded program and allowed us to dedicate skilled resource and invest in training for this critical evidence-based therapy: **The Dammann Fund; Fairfield County’s Community Foundation; Round Hill Community Church; XL Group**

<p>Thank you for Believing in Laurel House.</p> <p>Program and Operating Expense Grants</p>	<p>The Community Fund of Darien</p> <p>The Dammann Fund</p> <p>Fairfield County’s Community Foundation</p> <p>First Congregational Church of Greenwich</p> <p>First County Bank Foundation</p> <p>Google Ad Grants</p> <p>Greenwich Community Development Block Grant</p> <p>Greenwich Department of Social Services</p> <p>Max J. and Winnie S. Rosenshein Foundation</p> <p>Near & Far Aid</p> <p>New Canaan Community Foundation</p> <p>New Canaan Sewing Group</p> <p>Oak Foundation</p> <p>Round Hill Community Church</p> <p>XL Group</p>	<p>www.rtor.org Resource Specialist</p> <p>Thinking Well</p> <p>Thinking Well</p> <p>Food Service and Wellness</p> <p>Phone System</p> <p>www.rtor.org</p> <p>Housing Renovations</p> <p>Supported Education</p> <p>General Operating</p> <p>Food Service and Wellness</p> <p>www.rtor.org Resource Specialist</p> <p>Food Service and Wellness</p> <p>www.rtor.org</p> <p>Thinking Well</p> <p>Thinking Well</p>
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 Mrs. Lillian E. Anderson
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 Wendy MacCordy Watercolor Paintings

Laurel House honored **Alan D. Barry, Ph.D.** Commissioner, Social Services Town of Greenwich for his work in collaborating with mental health agencies throughout Southwestern Connecticut to develop a more effective network of programs, improve services and effectively communicate about available services.

"I believe it's time to pull mental illness out of the shadows, and turn the spotlight on mental health. We must get the word out that there is effective treatment available." – Dr. Alan Barry



Town Champions

Outstanding individuals representing towns in Fairfield County served by Laurel House; Honored for their advocacy and outreach to make their towns better places in which to live and work.



Darien/Fairfield
Kathy Gilbert, LCSW
Darien High School
& Board of Education



New Canaan
Cynthia Gorey
New Canaan
Community Foundation



Rowayton
Glenn & Mindy Houck
Civic & Community Leaders



Stamford
Dominick Bria
Community Ambassador



Weston
Holly Hinds, Esq.
Human Rights
Advocate and Mentor



Our 2015 Town Champions

laurel house
**DERBY
DINNER
DANCE**



Saturday, May 2, 2015



On Saturday, May 2nd, Laurel House hosted its 3rd Annual Derby Dinner Dance. Guests checked out the Hat Paddock, sipped mint juleps and watched American Pharoah win the 141st Kentucky Derby. Then it was off to the ballroom to enjoy Derby Delicacies Tail Gate Style and dance to the sounds of Alex Donner & his Orchestra.

Thank you to all of our friends and supporters who made May 2nd a night to remember.



Laurel House, Inc. & Friends of Laurel House, Inc.
 Summary Income & Expense For Years Ended June 30, 2013, 2014, 2015

	FY 2015	FY 2014	FY 2013
Revenues:			
Public Funding	1,690,662	1,703,537	1,740,186
Private & Other Revenue Sources:			
Rent, Thrift Shop, Services, Cafeteria	342,916	371,534	334,251
Private Funding	597,828	492,768	608,853
Total Revenue	2,631,406	2,567,839	2,683,290
Expenses:			
Salaries and Benefits	1,648,354	1,642,021	1,715,360
Operating Expenses	607,671	641,270	664,810
Development & Marketing	117,080	128,637	171,659
Interest	39,714	44,913	50,247
Total Expenses	2,412,819	2,456,841	2,602,076
Change in Net Assets	218,587	110,998	81,214
	% of Revenues	% of Revenues	% of Revenues
Public Funding	64.2%	66.3%	64.9%
Private & Other Revenue Sources:	35.8%	33.7%	35.1%

Sources of Private Funding
 Individuals 58%
 Corporations 12%
 Foundations 30%

FY 2015 Direct Services

Laurel House provided direct services to **729 individuals and 150 families**

Supported Employment
 181 participants; 163 employed in independent and supported jobs

Supported Education
 77 participants; 51 enrolled in: colleges (45); vocational training (4); vocational schools (2)

Housing and Residential Services
 88 individuals received housing and support services

Psychosocial Services
 437 individuals received services in: recovery planning, skill building, advocacy, peer support, participated in workshops; attended Thinking Well training; enjoyed meals and nutritious snacks in the Café, as well as at picnics, outings, dances and other Laurel House social programs

MISSION

Laurel House provides resources and opportunities for people living with mental illness to lead fulfilling and productive lives in their communities throughout Fairfield County.

CORE PURPOSE

Early Intervention and Remediation, Social Inclusion and Recovery

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Thinking Well

Fitness Training for the Brain

Thinking Well is the program name for a group of activities conducted at Laurel House that focus on improved cognition and healthy living.

Based on the Neuropsychological and Educational Approach to Cognitive Remediation (NEAR), this activity allows people to practice and improve their thinking skills, and discuss with peers how these skills apply to real life situations at home, school and in the workplace. Thinking Well incorporates daily computer drills and bridging groups.



Thinking Well focuses on the following areas of thought or cognition:

- attention
- memory
- problem solving
- processing speed
- mental flexibility

The program was created to address the long-term cognitive impairment that interferes with the daily lives of people with serious mental illness. Dr. Leonard M. Miller of the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine has likened this impairment to a bad guest: “It shows up early... and

it sticks around over the lifespan.” Many of the adverse outcomes associated with schizophrenia – social isolation, homelessness and the inability to hold a job – can be traced to cognitive impairment that continues, even after symptoms have been treated and controlled.

The Thinking Well program blends two basic techniques to address cognitive impairment: cognitive remediation and compensatory cognitive training.

Cognitive Remediation – uses individualized drills and group

bridging sessions to improve functioning in targeted areas of cognition, such as attention, memory and problem solving.

Compensatory Cognitive Training – focuses on the learning process to teach people real-world living skills and strategies, using a technique called ‘overlearning.’

Together, these two techniques form the foundation of Laurel House’s recovery-oriented approach to a very practical rehabilitation.

Goals of Thinking Well

- Create a supportive environment for participants to learn and to enjoy their interaction with others
- Stimulate learning or relearning of cognitive tasks and by extension, living skills
- Develop skills in the areas of attention, memory, problem solving, processing speed and mental flexibility to improve daily functioning
- Prepare program participants for the challenges of the workplace, school and independent living

Thinking Well at Laurel House

Laurel House offers daily sessions in cognitive remediation, consisting of computer-based drills and exercises, followed by group discussion. Sessions are led by skilled clinicians trained and certified by Dr. Alice Medalia, Director of Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Columbia University Medical Center and founder of the NEAR model of cognitive remediation.

Laurel House also offers the Skill Builders program, based on the compensatory cognitive training technique developed by Dr. Elizabeth Twamley of the University of California, San Diego. In addition to these two main offerings, the basic cognitive techniques of Thinking Well are integrated into the daily practice of Laurel House's recovery-oriented supported employment, supported education, and residential programs under the common theme of Thinking Well at Work, Thinking Well at School, Thinking Well at Home and Thinking Well in the Community.

For more information on Thinking Well at Laurel House please contact:

Janice Hilleman, LMSW
Recovery Coordinator
203.487.1616
jhilleman@laurelhouse.net

Laurel House, Inc.
1616 Washington Blvd.
Stamford, CT, 06902
www.laurelhouse.net

Frequently Asked Questions

Who can benefit from Thinking Well?

Thinking Well is intended for adults and young adults who have experienced problems with memory, attention, and problem-solving as the result of mental illness.

When does Thinking Well take place?

The Thinking Well program includes a range of activities that occur throughout the day at the Laurel House Resource Center on Washington Blvd. in Stamford, CT. The cognitive remediation portion of Thinking Well occurs 5 days a week in alternating morning and afternoon sessions.

Where does Thinking Well take place?

Most of the activities of Thinking Well occur in a space we call the "thinking well," a fully equipped resource room with current technology. Program activities can take place in any quiet space with Internet access, and our Cognitive Remediation Specialists are also able to provide this service off-site in group or private settings.

How long does Thinking Well treatment last?

A typical cycle of computer-based cognitive remediation will last approximately 4 months (30 sessions). A full cycle of Skill Builders cognitive training groups takes approximately 6 months. Many participants in the Thinking Well program start with cognitive remediation and then move on to Skill Builders. Some participants may continue sessions or re-enroll in the program to reinforce their learning.

Is there a fee for Thinking Well?

Those who qualify for publicly funded mental health services are eligible to participate in Thinking Well at no charge.

About Laurel House



Laurel House, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization located in Stamford, Connecticut, provides resources and opportunities for people living with mental illness to lead fulfilling and productive lives in their communities throughout Fairfield County.

Laurel House provides Resources to Recover, a robust array of integrated services and expertise helping people and their families along the path of mental health recovery.