

## Transition for Youth with Serious Mental Health Needs

Developed in collaboration with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services

### Meet Zach

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Zach\* is a sixteen-year-old student with a diagnosis of severe depression. He has been hospitalized four times in the past six months during psychotic and suicidal episodes. Before his most recent hospital admission, Zach slept almost 18 hours a day and withdrew from friends, family, and, at times, even food. Stable and on a new medication, he has recently returned to his high school part-time, thus allowing him to work at his own pace to complete high school credits. This was one of the many prioritized needs with action steps that were developed by Zach and his High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW) team that worked to support him in his return to the community.

### Youth and Mental Health

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In 2019, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reported that 3.2 million youth ages 12 to 17 experienced a major depressive episode in 2017, representing 13.3% of all adolescents in that age range. Students like Zach experiencing pervasive behavioral health challenges or diagnosed with serious mental illness might receive services through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Their individualized education programs (IEPs) might characterize their disabilities as emotional disability or other health impairment, and they could experience co-occurring behaviors that may present as moodiness, sadness, truancy, or substance abuse.

### High Fidelity Wraparound

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A recommendation from the hospital during Zach's discharge suggested Intensive Care Coordination using High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW) to assist him in returning home. HFW is a team-based, collaborative planning process for developing and implementing individualized care plans for youth with behavioral health challenges and their families. An Intensive Care Coordinator (also known as the HFW Facilitator) guides the team (including the youth, family, system partners, service providers, and natural supports) to develop and implement the student's individualized care plan.

## Action Plan

An important part of the process is developing an action plan based on the youth and family's prioritized needs. The Intensive Care Coordinator ensures the team understands these needs as well as corresponding strengths and culture; the coordinator must also balance these needs with system partner mandates, including those of the IEP. By breaking the larger prioritized needs into smaller goals, the action plans developed during HFW grow the family's confidence and skill set. Each plan is developed and reviewed by the team, and all plans have a measurable strategy.

Members of Zach's\* HFW team included: a psychiatrist, a Community Services Board counselor, a Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services counselor, and his home school IEP team. One of Zach's prioritized needs was to feel calmer at school. As a result, the HFW team developed an action step that permitted him to go to the school counselor's office if he felt overwhelmed. Additionally, his transition IEP reflected input from mental health services to help him develop skills to overcome feelings of anxiety.

## Virginia Wraparound Implementation Center

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In a partnership between the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the Office of Children's Services, Virginia established the Virginia Wraparound Implementation Center (VWIC) in 2019. VWIC provides training and technical assistance for the HFW workforce throughout Virginia and is currently operated by United Methodist Family Services. Visit [Virginia Wraparound Implementation Center](http://www.vwic.org) (vwic.org) for more information.

## Tips for Teachers

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- A student's diagnosis and disability information is confidential information. You must have consent to speak with the clinician or doctor.
- If a student has not connected with community mental health services, consult with school supports. School counselors, social workers, or psychologists can guide the student and family to secure needed supports within the community mental health system.
- If there are questions about a student's behavior or the side effects of medications, work with the IEP team to advocate for additional accommodations.
- The HFW and IEP team should consider how students with serious mental illness will continue with current medical or therapeutic services if they plan to leave their community after exiting school services.

\*Student's name has been changed for purposes of confidentiality.