

Providing quality care to more individuals

SUCCESS STORY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



At a glance

Community

- Behavioral Health

Organization

- WellStone

Location

- Alabama

Challenges

- Reaching and serving individuals where they are
- Address barriers to care posed by SDoH

Solutions

- myAvatar™
- Telehealth

Results

- Ability to treat complex populations and reduce recidivism rates
- Leveraging integration and virtual care to serve individual wherever they're at

WellStone addresses social determinants of health through care delivery tactics

About Wellstone

WellStone is North Alabama's largest and most comprehensive behavioral healthcare provider. They are a non-profit community organization offering a wide variety of services available for ages ranging from children to older adults. They treat over 13,000 clients per year and operate 12 total facilities across North Alabama.

Social Determinants of Health

Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) often impede individuals from seeking and receiving proper healthcare. This can include lack of stable housing, transportation barriers, financial burdens and more. When providers aren't able to efficiently address these complex psychosocial problems, it can lead to unnecessary emergency department (ED) visits, heightened incarceration rates for people with mental illness and even increased death rates for those with serious mental illnesses (SMI). Provider communities across the country are challenged to create services, programs and initiatives to address the needs and barriers posed by SDoH in a way that helps individuals thrive while empowering care organizations to successfully and efficiently serve complex populations.

WellStone addresses SDoH in its own community

WellStone has implemented a variety of SDoH initiatives to expand access to care, stimulate jail diversion and assist individuals living with a serious mental illness. Treatment modalities cover the full spectrum, including outpatient therapy, residential and inpatient care, psychiatric medical services and more.

“As we examined the data, we also recognized a pattern of individuals caught in a cycle of incarceration for these low-level offenses and increasing costs associated with incarceration.”

Jeremy Blair, WellStone CEO

Like many other providers, WellStone recognized the need to address SDoH and how these factors can affect and often prevent care in their community. WellStone's efforts began with aiming to reduce the number of people with mental illness in county jails. Inmates with a mental illness are often arrested for behavior related to their illness. With 16-25% of the national jail population living with a mental illness, proper treatment is often unfeasible during incarceration. This can lead to more health issues and increased risk for recidivism upon release.

"WellStone and our community recognized we needed to improve serving those affected by mental illness who were ending up in jail often for low-level offenses," WellStone CEO, Jeremy Blair said. "As we examined the data, we also recognized a pattern of individuals caught in a cycle of incarceration for these low-level offenses and increasing costs associated with incarceration."

In order to properly address these issues, WellStone joined The Stepping Up Initiative, a national initiative to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in jails.

The Stepping Up Initiative

This initiative works to address four key measures: reduce the number of individuals with mental illness in jails, shorten their incarceration time, connect them to treatment options and reduce recidivism upon release. The innovative program is sponsored by the American Psychiatric Association Foundation, the National Association of Counties and The Council of State Governments Justice Center, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. More than 500 counties nationwide have joined the initiative so far.

The Stepping Up Initiative prioritizes data collection and progress reporting using validated screening tools and assessments to gauge program success and track individual improvements.

In 2016, WellStone partnered with county commissioners to invite Leon Evans of the Restoration Center to speak to a specially-called commission meeting. After Leon's presentation about the programs

and services they were providing in San Antonio, the county commissioners signed the resolution in support of the Stepping Up Initiative.

WellStone jail diversion program makes an impact

Upon jail release, many individuals with a mental illness struggle to find housing and support, which can lead to longer stays in detention facilities. WellStone aligned with Stepping Up to create a jail diversion program to help former inmates with mental health issues re-enter society and sustain quality of life after incarceration. The overall program length is typically 12-24 months with two transitional phases.

For the first six months, the program focuses on finding temporary housing for the individual. WellStone providers will help ensure the person can access additional financial benefits such as Medicaid, as well as provide any necessary health services. Treatment plans are reviewed and approved by a judge and the District Attorney. Individuals in the program also receive vocational training during this time to develop skills to find meaningful and fulfilling work in their community.

From six to 24 months, staff work to find permanent housing for the individual as well as follow up with the person's mental health provider. Behavioral health treatment and planning is continued, which can include outpatient mental health services, outpatient substance use disorder services or other therapies such as anger management and domestic violence classes.

The completion of the program includes creation of a court-approved aftercare plan and aftercare team, which includes a coordinator, therapist, case manager and psychiatrist. Participation in the program requires close coordination with the courts. The case manager reports the participant's progress, treatment and any issues that could be deemed a risk for re-offending.

This program has seen major success since its implementation in 2018 saving over \$1.5 million—seven times the initial investment—for the 84 participants. In addition to the financial savings, participant's recidivism rates are 4% lower than non-participants.

Technology in jail diversion

Technology is a key component for efficient care delivery, data collection and measuring program progress. The WellStone treatment team uses the Netsmart myAvatar electronic health record (EHR) to coordinate care and treatment planning. Designed specifically for behavioral health and addiction treatment organizations, myAvatar allows providers to access and share information quickly and easily, which is vital for collaborative care planning.

Tracking outcomes and measurements helps WellStone better understand the populations they're serving, to determine success of the program and gain access to clinical and operational decision makers. Wellstone uses Netsmart's KPI Dashboards Business Intelligence metrics enabling them to track organizational goals and progress. The data visualization for clinical, financial and operational data gives Wellstone an easy review of key performance indicators (KPIs) linked to outcome data and individual program progress.

Virtual care, the new norm

WellStone is currently leveraging telehealth in a variety of settings and working toward removing barriers to care while addressing the industry-wide provider shortage. One setting is in schools, where telehealth tablets are utilized for virtual care appointments for students experiencing a mental illness. Students in nearby Madison County schools have access to WellStone care team members any time of the day. This is especially beneficial for schools in remote settings where the nearest provider may be out of reach. Telehealth devices in schools have increased access to care and removed any geographical/transportation barriers or other SDoH-related obstacles that could prevent the child from receiving care. It also decreases the amount of time a student is out of class. Family members and caregivers can join the virtual visit, which prevents them from having to leave work or other responsibilities to attend the appointment. Not only is virtual care in schools a cost-efficient option for children's mental health care, it also helps teachers and school administrators properly address and handle mental health issues among their students.

WellStone will be implementing telehealth sessions conducted by a law enforcement officer who encounters an individual in need of mental health assistance.

By facilitating a telehealth session onsite, the individual in question can be seen by a clinical professional thereby avoiding arrest and/or a costly hospital emergency bill. Virtual care linking with law enforcement helps triage individuals to appropriate services that may have not been pursued if the police had not been brought into this virtual loop.

The Jail Diversion model has exceeded WellStone's expectations in its impact on the clients and community they serve. It is clear from the results that addressing SDoH is one of the keys in delivering lasting impact and change for clients affected by mental illness. Blair also notes the impact technology has made in the organization's successful initiatives.

"A clear component of that success is leveraging the technology such as myAvatar, KPI and telehealth through Netsmart," Blair said, "These resources have enabled us to deliver, track and measure the impact of our care."

Blair noted that as WellStone continues to grow and deliver care in their communities, they will continue to expand the jail diversion model and collaboration with law enforcement partners, as well as continuing to leverage Netsmart technology for integrated, whole-person care.

Learn more about Netsmart clients at
www.ntst.com/Hear-from-clients

About Netsmart

Netsmart designs, builds and delivers electronic health records (EHRs), solutions and services that are powerful, intuitive and easy-to-use. Our platform provides accurate, up-to-date information that is easily accessible to care team members in behavioral health, home care, senior living and social services. We make the complex simple and personalized so our clients can concentrate on what they do best: provide services and treatment that support whole-person care.

By leveraging the powerful Netsmart network, care providers can seamlessly and securely integrate information across communities, collaborate on the most effective treatments and improve outcomes for those in their care. Our streamlined systems and personalized workflows put relevant information at the fingertips of users when and where they need it.

For 50 years, Netsmart has been committed to providing a common platform to integrate care.