

**Testimony before Task Force to Study the Provision of Behavioral Health Services for Young Adults
January 14, 2014**

Anastasia Chamiec

Age: 26

Past Affiliations: DCF, DMHAS YAS

Current Affiliations: Reliance House Inc. and Join Rise Be

To the members of the Task Force to Study the Provision of Behavioral Health Services for Young Adults - my name is Anastasia Chamiec and I am from Norwich, Connecticut.

I am here today, like my peers, to share my perspective as a young person in long-term recovery from primary mental health diagnoses.

Per Senate Bill No. 1160, Section 66, I would like to specifically address the recommendation areas related to: **1) Improving behavioral health screening, early intervention and treatment and 5) Improving the delivery system for behavioral health services.**

All of my adolescence and part of my young adulthood I struggled to accept that I had a mental illness. A big part of this was because I was in the custody of DCF and they were unable to find a permanent placement for me. **It seemed that finding me a place to sleep took 100% of the time and trumped helping me to understand how I could learn to manage my emotions.** The lack of permanency meant that I was never offered appropriate supports for my mental health because I was never in the same place long enough to connect with resources.

All of this lead me to not trust authority figures and I did not respect their opinion because I had to learn early in life how to deal with the chaos on my own. **A huge part of me was scared, angry, and confused as to how I could be pushed aside as if I didn't have a right to know what was going on.**

I believe that in part, the system itself didn't allow anyone working with me to have time to form a connection with me and answer my questions. **This is especially relevant to the fact that the department missed my ABI/TBI (Acquired Brain/Traumatic Brain Injury) diagnosis, and I sometimes wonder if this had been detected and treated from the beginning then I wouldn't have experienced the mental health challenges I have in the same way.**

What I have found since receiving services from Reliance House, is that it's about fully empathizing with what this person might be going through, or have gone through, so that behavioral health screenings can occur earlier and capture a more accurate picture of the individual.

In general, it's not just about testing for a mental health diagnosis - it also involves strengthening the connection between everyone involved in that young person's life and with the young person directly.

It is critical that the young person is involved in the decisions being made about their diagnosis and their treatment plan, while they should be offered alternative recovery supports that available in their community. In essence, the young person should be empowered to steer the direction of their lives from the beginning.

By implementing a system that is centered on the individual, and focuses on strengthening the connections between groups, you will establish a delivery system that will enhance overall programming and bring about a common good.

I say this because when I made the decision, for myself, to seek recovery by accessing mental health services I have been able to do things like go back to school, learn about my diagnoses, help other in recovery, and promote change. **The thing is, it didn't have to take so many years... and I didn't have to struggle through so much to realize that I had a life worth living.**

Thank you for providing my peers, and I, the opportunity to share our perspective, as young people in recovery.