

**Personal Testimony from a 12-Year-Old Youth
Regarding His Family's Experience with
The Coordinated Services Team (CST) Initiative
At a Public Hearing on their County's Annual Budget**

November, 2012

"I wasn't really a volunteer to be here, but I am glad to be here. I want to say something that's really important about CST. It's a program that helps people like my sister. She is special needs. They've been working with her for the last year and tomorrow will be the last time we meet and that will be the end so almost exactly a year. But, it's a program that helps my sister. Over the last year I've seen an incredible difference in her, and I know she's never going to be perfect, but she's close to what she can be. And, well we have these meetings and we talk about the problems that happen with my sister and the people who are important in her life are there, and people like me who usually don't get a say in what happens with her, do there. It's hard when, I'll be honest here, my dad is also special needs a little bit, which can make it hard for things like that to get accomplished. Even when that isn't happening CST makes sure that they'll come by school and make sure I'm heard and my needs are being met. They really don't work just for the one person like my sister, they work with the entire family. That's why I think that it's such an important matter and why I don't know, but I know my sister really needs it. It's sad that it's going to end. Hopefully it's not going to for a lot of other kids."

**Personal Testimony from a Mother Regarding Her Family's Experience with
The Coordinated Services Team (CST) Initiative
At a Public Hearing on their County's Annual Budget**

November, 2012

"My name is Sarah* and I am the mother of a child who just finished her last team meeting today. I am just going to read you this, and this is my family's experience with CST.

I am the mother of a 10 year old daughter, Amelia*, She has bipolar disorder with elements of borderline personality disorder. I'm not sure if any of you know what it's like to live with someone who has a personality disorder, much less have a child with this disease. It's exhausting, it's heartbreaking, and it's overwhelming. Amelia* is a difficult child, very hard to please, and very unpredictable. She began seeing a counselor at age 3.

As she began to age she began showing signs of mental illness. As her disease progressed we became prisoners in our home. By the time Amelia* was 6 years old I could not take my family out to eat, to the movies, or even to the park because her behaviors were too interruptive and too unpredictable. I could not leave her with her older sisters for very long because she would often become violent. I could not have babysitters, they could not control her. Her impulsive and explosive behaviors prevented her from having friends or even playing with her sisters. At one point about a year ago my oldest daughter was preparing to join to Marine Corp and she said to me "I can't wait for boot camp, it can't be any worse than this." I was doing everything I knew to do. She was seeing a counselor, psychiatrist, pediatrician, and a specialist in Marshfield. She was taking mood stabilizing medication. I had enrolled her in a half day treatment program in town, and she had a number of interventions in place at school. But things just weren't getting any better. I had all the pieces but they were just too independent of one another, and that's where CST came in. I applied but was put on a waiting list.

During this waiting period things in my family's world were really falling apart. My oldest daughters did everything they could to get out of the house. I even ended up having to move my youngest daughter into my bedroom because she shared a room with Amelia* and it was no longer safe for her to be in there alone with her. Then one night last September things came to a head. Amelia* terrorized my then two year old into a corner and laughed while she sat there and cried. My then 13 year old tried to intervene; Amelia* turned on her violently and threatened to kill her. And that's when that was it and I was done. I called the police and had Amelia* removed from my home. She stayed with a family friend for about two weeks and during that two week period I met with the psychiatrist and told him things had to change quickly, if not I was going to request Amelia* be placed in an in-patient treatment facility. Instead he said "let's try a new medication."

We finally made our way to the top of the CST waiting list. I met with the social worker just a little over a year ago, and she did a wonderful job putting our family first, not just Amelia*. She recognized that we were all suffering through Amelia's* mental illness and we all needed help. The social worker and I came up with an emergency plan. I had a number I could call for help at any time and even a foster home for emergency respite. The CST worker set up regular respite care with a family friend so both Amelia* and our family could get a break. She exposed me to a number of programs that were beneficial to both Amelia* and the family that otherwise I would not have had access to. She brought everything together. We had a plan and she encouraged me to reach out to people in my life and ask for help. She brought Amelia* into meetings where she'd sit face-to-face with this entire team of people. I finally had a team that had my back.

In the past 12 months Amelia* had made great strides in her school, graduated from her treatment program, and has even made and kept trends. More importantly my family is healing. We're able to go places together even if it is just for a short time. She is able to play with her now 4 year old sister and share a room again. She plays games and hangs out with her now 15 year old sister and talks regularly with her oldest sister in the Marine Corp. We like to be together. We have dinner every night. We're a normal family now. Without CST this story would have a different ending. She would not be the mostly happy little girl who is a member of the swim team, she would not be catching up academically. I would be guilt ridden. My other daughters would be disappointed and scared, and we would not be a family. Thank you."

**Names have been changed*