

Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, we are Michael and Juley Salisbury of Freeport, Maine.

In the fall of 2015, life took a startling turn for our then 17 year old son Isaac. The onset of Depression and Psychosis was quick and dramatic for him. He was convinced he did something terribly wrong, that he physically hurt many people and that because of his actions everyone was out to hurt him. The psychosis Isaac felt was extremely terrifying to him and very scary for us as it was completely out of character for him.

Fortunately, during the course of his hospitalization we were introduced to the PIER program. After the first visit from the PIER social worker in the hospital, and a visit with the attending PIER psychiatrist, we all started to feel hope. Hope is one of the key elements of any mental illness crisis and recovery. Early intervention is so critical in what we now understand is a lifelong condition.

PIER helped us in the following ways:

Group Counseling - The multi-family group counseling was very valuable to Isaac's recovery and our ability to support him. We were able to share our experiences with other families in similar situations. With the help of a structured program provided by PIER counselors, we could "group-solve" a particular challenge a young person was dealing with. We often left these meetings with fresh, new ideas to aid in Isaac's recovery and be reassured that we are not alone.

Family & Individual Counseling - Through individual counseling, our son could learn tools to deal with his evolving illness. Through family counseling, we learned more about Isaac's condition and realized that he was not "crazy". He was experiencing depressed feelings that we all feel from time to time. However, Isaac's depressed feelings were very intense and manifested into psychotic thoughts. Learning this fact helped reassure us that the Isaac we know and love was still there and better days were ahead. Whole family care is crucial to this type of recovery. The caregivers need as much support as the patients.

Coordinated Medication Management - Our family, the PIER social workers and psychiatrist worked closely together to manage Isaac's psychiatric medications. With many eyes on the case, the team could more quickly react to needed changes during the ups and downs of Isaac's recovery. Having all of the providers in one program and able to confer each week made his recovery from psychosis quicker than it would have been if we were dealing with multiple individual practices.

School/Job Support - PIER provides an Education Specialist to facilitate getting back to school. They attend any necessary meetings at the school to explain what the student is experiencing and what accommodations may be needed. Isaac was able to return to high school and graduate with his class. Isaac recently graduated from Thomas College in Waterville, Maine with a bachelor's degree in sports / business management. During his time at school he was recognized in the Thomas magazine for his dedicated work maintaining the campus outdoor ice rink each winter and the Thomas website highlighted his summer internship with the Maine State Golf Association. Isaac is now working full-time at the Thomas College Harold Alfond Business Institute and is looking forward to the future.

Is Isaac cured? No. He will need to carefully deal with his mental health for the rest of his life and undoubtedly will face challenges in the future. Does Isaac have the tools to deal with his mental illness? Absolutely. He has these tools because of what we all learned through our participation in the PIER program.

We strongly support the passage of LD 674. Expanding the PIER program to reach more young people dealing with first onset psychosis reduces the chance of further hospitalizations and helps these young people have a much better chance to lead productive lives living with a mental illness. The data clearly shows that connecting with the correct treatment during first onset psychosis is absolutely key in improving patient outcomes. Passing LD 674 will provide this opportunity to the many more young people & families that desperately need these services. Isaac is proof that this program works. Thank you.

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