

INTERFACE REFERRAL SERVICE QUESTION AND ANSWER FACTSHEET

What is Interface:

Interface is a mental health information and referral service at William James College, effectively serving numerous municipalities across Massachusetts. The referrals focus on outpatient psychotherapy; not emergency situations requiring inpatient hospitalization or rehabilitation beds. The service benefits mostly people suffering from behavioral health disorders such as depression and anxiety.

Trained and licensed behavioral health professionals answer the telephones from 9am-5pm Monday through Friday. They conduct an in-depth assessment of the caller to understand the specific nature of their mental health problem and their particular needs or constraints, including payment and insurance restrictions as well as time and location considerations. Interface has a continued updated list of professionals that includes their expertise, location and payment arrangements.

Who is served?

Any community resident, young or old. This includes students who attend a public or private school in town. Interface does not serve town employees, unless the employees also reside in Milton.

What primary problem does Interface seek to address?

Interface addresses the pervasive problem of mental health disorders, in people of all ages. In the United States, diagnosable mental health disorders afflict about one in four adults in any given year, excluding substance use disorders. Additionally, one in five children will experience a behavioral health problem. In just the five years between 2010 and 2015, the number of teens who felt depressed surged 33 percent in large national surveys. Teen suicide attempts increased by 23 percent, and is the third leading cause of death for children.

In Milton, a survey of school leaders, conducted by the Social Emotional Learning Facilitator, indicated that mental health issues are of critical concern in the schools, a sentiment reflected by other Massachusetts school leaders. Milton high school students report depression at significantly higher rates than their Massachusetts counterparts, according to a national survey administered locally.

Moreover, late-life depression afflicts millions of Americans age 65 and older. One-third of the behavioral health emergency room visits of Milton residents (BID Milton Hospital, 2014) were by senior citizens, and a 2011 Tufts Health Foundation analysis showed that 27% of local seniors had been diagnosed with depression in their lifetimes.

Why is this service so important?

Only a fraction of people seeks out and receive the mental health treatment they need. There are many reasons for this. One major reason is that the mental health system is complicated and frustrating to deal with—especially when one is suffering from mental illness. It's hard to identify which counselors specialize in treating the problem at hand, there is a shortage of available practitioners, and insurance coverage is complicated and limited.

Referring people to a mental health clinician is not the same as a primary doctor referring a patient to a medical specialist. There needs to be a good human and professional match. Providing a person suffering from a mental disorder with a list of potential providers, and then sending them on their way, is not an appropriate mechanism for referral. They often need assistance and follow up, because their emotions are involved. In addition, it is frustrating for people experiencing a mental health challenge to tell their same story over and over again until a clinician with availability is found. This frustration results in only a small percentage of people ending up receiving the behavioral health care they need.

How can Interface help?

At no cost to the caller, a trained mental health counselor (with a minimum of master level training) will conduct an in-depth behavioral health assessment. The Interface counselor then does all the work for the caller to reduce, as much as possible, their level of frustration and barriers to following through with getting help. The Interface counselor can *speaks the language* of the mental health providers and can explain, in professional terms, the caller's presenting mental health condition. Shortly after the intake assessment, the caller will be presented with a list of appropriate behavioral health clinicians who have immediate availability and will match their logistical and payment requirements. The caller is then responsible for following through with making the appointment, to demonstrate their commitment to getting help.

In addition, Interface checks in with the caller to make certain they are satisfied with the professional match. If they are not, the process continues until the caller has found someone who is appropriate for their needs. In certain circumstances and with permission, the counselor will speak to a third party, such as a school Guidance Counselor or Council on Aging Social Worker regarding the caller's status.

Is Interface Cost-Effective?

The cost of the Interface Referral Program is \$12,500/annum, and requires a two-year contract. Milton Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition interviewed three users, two of whom are non-profit funders for multiple districts in their service area. Those funders indicated that all but one of the districts have renewed the service contract with Interface because they are so satisfied. The bottom line is that most municipalities consider the service *indispensable*.