



COMMUNITY
SUPPORT
SERVICES

LIFE CHAT

A publication spotlighting CSS clients

February 2025

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We want to hear from you!

For details about the Recovery Advisory Council (RAC) or to contribute your artwork or recovery story to *Life Chat*, call 330-253-9388 and dial 407 for Michelle Mace or 133 for Tina Lanzy.

From homeless to healing

CSS services lead to housing, better life for client



For a time, a porta-john like this one became shelter for Amanda. Treatment and support from CSS helped her achieve stability and success.

Amanda Tokar's apartment isn't what most would call big or fancy. But the cozy one-bedroom is a gleaming mansion compared to the five-foot space she used to curl up in at night – the space inside a porta-john in a parking lot.

Most people can't imagine getting to a place where they would spend a month living in a portable toilet, but mental illness and a series of events led Amanda to that fate.

For years, she lived with anxiety and paranoia and had unstable relationships. Still, she was able to maintain different jobs and an apartment. That changed in 2019 when a dispute with neighbors caused her landlord to evict her. Without the time or funds to get another apartment, her car became her home.

For more than two years, she lived in her car, sleeping there when she wasn't working. She was struggling, but she didn't seek help because she believed she could manage on her own. Then her car – *her home* – was repossessed. As her car was taken away, she was left standing in the parking lot with only a blanket and whatever she could grab from her car. That's when the porta-potty became her shelter.

She would wander the streets during the day and return to sleep at night. But this wouldn't last either – someone caught on, and the porta-john was padlocked. Her shelter was gone.

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Fortunately, a member of Community Support Services' homeless outreach team found Amanda, gave her a sleeping bag, supplies and a path to being housed. Eventually, CSS placed Amanda at a respite house and then found her an apartment through the Blue Heron program, a supportive housing program that provides intensive case management. The program also connects participants with service providers, substance use treatment options and doctors.

Unfortunately, Amanda experienced a setback when her mental health symptoms persisted and caused conflict with her neighbors. She needed to move again.

CSS found Amanda another apartment through Blue Heron, and it was there that things took a positive turn. Amanda began taking her medication consistently, and her mental health improved. She developed a sense of community and appreciates the good neighbors she has now.



Amanda, during a recent visit to CSS.

"I love my apartment. It's perfect for me," she said. "I feel great. I've got all sorts of (decorations)."

Having a stable space of her own was just one thing that helped boost Amanda's recovery. She also credits medication for helping her to finally gain focus. "The medication really calms you down. It helps you think clearly," she said. With that focus, Amanda was able to get a part-time job as a cashier and recently bought a used car. She hopes to soon rekindle relationships with her three children, who are ages 9, 19 and 21.

Amanda has had a remarkable journey from where she was. Her case manager, Erin Metzger, says Amanda's attitude was a big part of her success. Amanda "worked really hard throughout (her) journey and always contributed to what (she) had to do," Metzger said.

Amanda is grateful she overcame her hesitancy to get help, especially medication, and accepted the support CSS' doctors and her case managers have given her.

"In the end of it, it works out," she said. "They know what they're doing."



Have Medicaid and Marketplace? Having both isn't recommended



Health insurance coverage can be confusing and complicated, especially if someone calls you and offers you coverage you're not familiar with. You could be tempted to make changes, even when you're not sure they're right for you.

Community Support Services clients should talk to their case managers before making any changes to their insurance coverage. In particular, if you have both Medicaid and a Marketplace plan, you should let your case manager know. A Marketplace plan is not needed because Medicaid covers everything.

If you have Medicaid, you can't get help paying for your Marketplace premiums, copays, or deductibles. You may end up paying more, paying back what was covered, and paying back any incentives you were given. Also, your Marketplace plan may not cover all your medications.

To cancel Marketplace, you must call and request your coverage be stopped. For more information, talk to your case manager. More information also is available online at

<https://tinyurl.com/2w3vu3jk>.

Programs offer free tax-preparation services

It's coming up on that time of year – tax time! Filing taxes can be confusing and time consuming. Fortunately, a number of area organizations offer programs that can help area residents file their taxes. The best part? They do it for free for eligible taxpayers! Here are some options:

- **Community Action Akron Summit** administers the Akron Summit Earned Income Tax Credit Program, which provides free tax preparation service for low-income and moderate-income families. Appointment can be made by calling **234-206-3170**. For more details, visit www.ca-akron.org.
- The **United Way of Summit & Medina** offers the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program. Volunteer tax preparers can prepare federal and state tax returns for free for households with an income of less than \$67,000. Tax-preparation options include in person, drop off and free self-file. To schedule an appointment, call 2-1-1. For more details, visit www.uwsummitmedina.org/vita.
- **AARP Foundation Tax-Aide** offers free tax assistance, with a focus on older adults with low to moderate income. Access to different types of taxpayer assistance varies by location. Locations include some of the Akron-Summit County Public Library branches. For more details, use the Tax-Aide site locator at www.aarp.org/money/taxes/aarp_taxaide.



Client groups offer support

CSS offers treatment groups that can help clients with various mental health concerns.

One such group is Treatment Readiness. This group is for those who are thinking about how their substance use has an effect on their lives or mental health. Participants don't have to be free of substance use to participate. If you've ever thought about making a change, you may be interested in joining. The group meets from 1 to 2 p.m. on Mondays and Fridays.

For those who struggle with anger, CSS offers an anger-management group from 1 to 2 p.m. on Thursdays. It offers tools for managing irritability and healthy conflict resolution. Participants don't have to be court ordered to attend.

Need social interaction? The Making Connections group can help you form healthy social connections despite having social anxiety. It meets from 1 to 2 p.m. on Mondays.

Other groups are offered to clients in Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), as well.

If you are interested in joining a group, talk to your case manager to see which groups are accepting new members.



Art of Recovery coming up

This year's Art of Recovery celebration is set for 5:30 to 8 p.m. March 25 at a *new* location – House Three Thirty. The venue is the former Tangier event space at 532 W. Market St., Akron, which is now owned by the LeBron James Family Foundation.

More than 50 works of art created by CSS client-artists will on display and up for bids in an online auction. The artwork will be available for viewing online prior to the event, with the auction starting March 21 and ending March 25.

Tickets to the live event include heavy appetizers and music from 91.3 The Summit FM. The event also will include an awards presentation.

For updates, visit www.cssbh.org/ArtOfRecovery2025. For tickets and to view or bid on artwork in the auction, visit bidpal.net/AOR25.





COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES

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Help us to improve!

CSS depends on client feedback to find out what we're doing right and where we can improve. You can help us by taking a client survey and sharing your thoughts.

The surveys are anonymous and provide the opportunity to offer suggestions.

If you are a CSS client, please fill out our satisfaction survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/qrcode2024, or scan the QR code with your phone, and you'll be taken to the website where you can fill out the survey.

We appreciate your feedback!



Mission Statement

Community Support Services: Helping you achieve a healthy mind and body while supporting you to live and work in your community.

Recovery Definition

Recovery is the continuous process of empowering an individual so he or she may live a satisfying and contributing life. It is a shared responsibility among the individual, the treatment staff, family, friends, and the community to:

- Discover or rediscover strengths and abilities
- Pursue personal goals
- Develop a sense of self-identity that allows the person to grow beyond his or her diagnosis

The Recovery Advisory Council is a collaborative effort with clients & family members to continuously improve the satisfaction of services for all Community Support Services clients.

