Somerset Team for Early Psychosis (STEP)  
What we can offer

Welcome to the Somerset Team for Early Psychosis. We have put together this leaflet to give you some information about STEP and what we can do to help you on your road to recovery.

This leaflet will give you some information about what we can offer. If you are interested in accessing any of the support below, please discuss this with your care coordinator.

What is the Somerset Team for Early Psychosis?

STEP is part of Somerset Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. We provide an enhanced three year service for people in Somerset experiencing a first episode of psychosis.

We have bases in Taunton, Yeovil, Bridgwater and Wells.

Who is the service for?

Individuals aged between 14 and 35 years who are experiencing a first episode of psychosis and their families.

What do we offer?

Your care coordinator will offer you advice and support your recovery in a number of ways. They may also feel that you would benefit from the help of other services and will be able to discuss this with you and refer you to the right people.

Social Integration

Our social support networks are important in keeping us well and in supporting recovery. Unfortunately, for some people, psychosis and other mental health problems can be associated with isolation, withdrawal and other social difficulties.

STEP workers aim to support social integration in lots of different ways. For example you may have noticed that you have withdrawn from seeing your friends and your care coordinator can work with you to develop strategies to help you begin to socialise again once you feel able to. STEP also runs a number of social groups which can be helpful for people who are isolated, have difficulties socialising or people who would just like an opportunity to spend time with others. Recent groups have included activities such as cooking, walking gardening and conservation. STEP workers who facilitate the groups are always keen to hear feedback and ideas for future groups.
Accommodation and independent living skills

Some people experiencing psychosis can find that they have difficulties with managing their accommodation and with daily living skills. This can be very stressful and you may require some extra support in these areas. Your care coordinator can support you to retain your current accommodation or find more appropriate accommodation if your current accommodation is not suitable. We can also help you to develop skills to allow you to live independently such as shopping, cleaning, budgeting and planning your day.

Finance and benefits

Claiming all the benefits you are entitled to is important to ensure you have enough money to live on and look after yourself. The welfare system can be complicated and your care coordinator can provide you with support regarding finance and benefits. You may be entitled to benefits or may be having difficulties completing the necessary paperwork to ensure you continue to receive the correct benefits. Your care coordinator can provide practical support to help you to access benefits or can signpost you to other services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau who can give you specialist advice.

Drug issues

Some people experiencing psychosis or other mental health difficulties say that they take drugs or drink alcohol to help them cope with symptoms. However, even a small amount of drugs and alcohol can make the symptoms of psychosis worse and make treatment less effective. Your care coordinator will be able to support you to think about how drugs and alcohol might be affecting your mental health. They can provide information about drugs and alcohol as well as how these substances impact on the symptoms of psychosis. Sometimes, your care coordinator might discuss issues around addiction and whether you could benefit from a specialist drug and alcohol service. If appropriate, they can support you to access these services.

Medication management

For some people, one of the most effective treatments for psychosis is medication. Your care coordinator can arrange for you to see a psychiatrist to discuss whether medication would be beneficial for you. If you are unsure about taking medication, the psychiatrist will be able to answer your questions and your care coordinator can give you information about medication and support you to make a decision about whether medication is right for you.

Sometimes, medication can have unwanted effects and if you are prescribed medication your care coordinator and psychiatrist will ensure that you receive the right monitoring of both the positive and negative (side) effects of this. You may need to have regular health checks so that the effects of medication can be closely monitored and changes can be made to your medication if this is required.
If you are prescribed medication and have difficulties taking this or experience any side effects you can discuss this with your care coordinator who will support you to manage your medication.

**Coping with symptoms**

Hearing voices, having jumbled thoughts or strange ideas and experiencing hallucinations are all common symptoms of psychosis. You will be able to discuss symptoms with your care coordinator, who will have experience of working with lots of people who have similar experiences. They will be able to work with you to find strategies that can help you to manage your symptoms and identify any things which might be making your symptoms harder to cope with.

Some people find it helpful to discuss their symptoms with others who have similar experiences and to learn that they are not alone. Somerset Partnership runs a number of Hearing Voices groups across the county. These small groups meet weekly or fortnightly and aim to support people by giving them a forum to speak about their voices, to encourage people to find their own explanations or meanings for their voices and to allow voice-hearers to get support and tips/ideas for managing voices.

**Relapse prevention**

Many people who experience psychosis will fully recover and only ever have one episode. However, some people may experience more than one episode. When a person who has recovered becomes unwell again this is known as a relapse. In many cases there will be signs that a person is becoming unwell again, which means you can take steps to prevent this.

Your care coordinator will work with you to discover what these warning signs are and can help you to make a personalised action plan so you know what to do and who to contact if you notice any of these warning signs.

**Education support**

Some people who experience mental health difficulties, such as psychosis, can find that they struggle to maintain their usual level of functioning in education or work. An important component of STEP’s work is supporting individuals who are in education to be able to remain at school, college or university. If you are having difficulties related to education your care coordinator can liaise with your school, college or university and give specialist advice and support to others who may be working with you such as teachers. Care coordinators can also help you to find out about and access any specialist support services offered by your school, college or university.
**Employment support**

The Employment Support Service (ESS) work with people with mental health difficulties to protect their existing employment or support them to find work as they begin their recovery. The emphasis of their work is to support people in securing paid work, at or above minimum wage, in the open job market.

For individuals who are currently out of work, and would like to find a new job, the ESS approach emphasises active job searching. This means focusing on engaging the individual directly with the local job market, identifying the work that they would like to do, and finding relevant vacancies. The individual is then supported, at an appropriate level, through the recruitment process from application to interview and then into work. Support is maintained during the induction phase of employment, and for a period of time afterwards, to ensure that there is a consistent level of support.

For individuals who currently work and are experiencing mental health difficulties the ESS can offer support to protect this employment. This can involve interventions including employer liaison, graded return to work plans, incorporating adjustments and accommodations into the workplace and on-going on-the-job support.

**Psychological therapy**

Psychological therapy (sometimes known as talking therapy) aims to help people to make sense of their difficulties by understanding how their thoughts, feelings, behaviour and environment interact and influence each other. Psychological therapy can take different forms and Somerset Partnership employs a range of psychologists and therapists who are trained in a number of different psychological models. These models include cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), art therapy, systemic psychotherapy, group psychotherapy, psychodynamic psychotherapy and cognitive analytic therapy. Your care coordinator can refer you to the psychological therapy service if it is felt this would be helpful for you. You would then usually have an assessment to see which type of therapy would suit you.

**Family support**

When somebody experiences psychosis, it has an impact not only on that individual but also on members of their family. It can be difficult for the family to understand and know how to help the individual with psychosis. It can also be very stressful to live with someone who is experiencing new and sometimes frightening thoughts about themselves or others.

STEP care coordinators work closely with families and can help your family to understand what’s happening for you. They can also act as an advocate for you within the family to ensure your views and opinions are heard. We hope to involve your family in the care planning and review process and support your family so that they do not feel stressed and know how best to support you.
Family Service for Psychosis (FSP)

Research shows us that people with psychosis are much less likely to have further episodes of psychosis when family members/supporters take part in family sessions.

The Family Service for Psychosis works with families in which someone has their first experience of psychosis. Their aims are to help families to find helpful ways of dealing with their specific problems and to help family members to look after their own needs as well as each others’ during stressful times. Your care coordinator can refer you and your family to the FSP. An initial assessment would usually be arranged with you and your family, during which you will be given information about how the FSP will work with you and agree the best way forward for your family.

Family and Friends Groups

STEP runs psychoeducation groups for family members and friends of young people experiencing psychosis. The group is run by STEP workers and around six families will be invited to join each group. The group takes place over 5 sessions and aims to provide information about psychosis and mental health services, to support members in developing and sharing coping strategies, to help with particular problems that families might be facing and for families to be able to support one another effectively.

If any of your family members or other supporters are interested in attending a family and friends group, your care coordinator will be able to provide more information about this.

CONTACT DETAILS

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If you need more information please contact

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