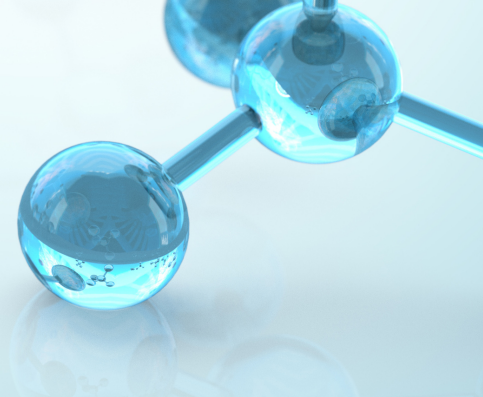


# THE PRESENCE OF MIND

UMASS MIND RESEARCH AND CLINICAL PROGRAM



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## CLINICAL

### Peer Support Offered for Individuals with Early Psychosis During Their Recovery Journey by Ruben Noroian

The UMass Screening and Treatment of Early Psychosis (STEP) Clinic, located at Community HealthLink provides both patients and families with education, support and specialty treatment during the crucial early phase of psychotic disorders. Thomas Lambert joined the STEP clinic a few months ago as a peer coach case manager.

“I’m the middle person between the patient and the psychiatrists and clinicians, allowing for more personalized treatment plans,” stated Thomas.

The resources of the STEP clinic allow patients to receive treatment in different areas they may be struggling with. Now, with the new peer coach role, Thomas helps provide more recovery support to people with early symptoms of psychosis, based on their personal needs. A unique aspect of the peer coach role is that it requires someone with lived experience of mental illness or substance use, enabling a better connection and sense of understanding to be formed with the people they serve.

Thomas sits with other members of the treatment team once a month to go over details about each patient, discussing high risk cases and what can be done to better care for them. By bridging the gap between patients and clinical providers, Thomas’s role helps deliver higher quality care for struggling members of the community, and promote both clinical and personal recovery.



Thomas Lambert

Thomas also goes out into the community each day, creating roadmaps for patients to assist them in their daily life. He discusses their goals with them, such as learning a language or playing the piano, and helps strategize how they can achieve their short- and long-term goals. In their peer-led group meetings that are held every Tuesday, members brainstorm topics that allow for interactive, educational sessions. Discussions are focused on life skills and interests that can benefit group members in their recovery. Some of the most recent group meeting topics were music, stress, and hygiene.

The peer coach’s role requires an active listener and someone who genuinely cares about the challenges other people face. Thomas is motivated to provide more hands-on support for people who utilize the STEP clinic- both at the clinic and in the community.

“You need to follow up, be mindful and put yourself into the other person's shoes. You need to ask yourself what you can do to make them better,” he said.



# RESEARCH

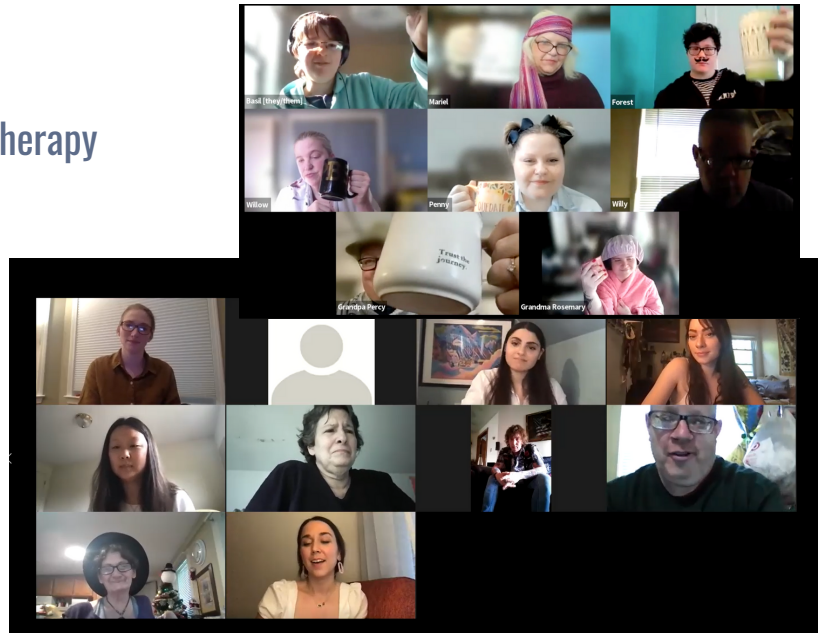
## Recovery Through Performance: Virtual Drama Therapy

by Jill Jones

Although pharmacological treatments alleviate symptoms of serious mental illness (SMI), they have also been shown to cause adverse effects that reduce the overall quality of life for these individuals. In response, researchers have been searching for alternative options regarding treatment of SMI, with more attention being placed on complementary and integrative approaches. Creative Art Therapies (CAT) have been shown to promote emotional expression and spontaneity, making it emerging type of therapy for people with schizophrenia.

UMass MIND has been collaborating with Lesley University's Dr. Laura Wood since 2021. Dr. Wood is the developer of the "Co-Active Therapeutic Theatre Model" (CoATT), which aims to promote a cooperative approach to mental health recovery through performance. The purpose of the program was to assess the efficacy of the CoATT for people with SMI and its ability to minimize symptom severity while maximizing real life functioning. Other goals of the program were to improve the self-esteem of the participants and promote community integration within the SMI population.

The program was carried out over 12 weeks, where participants met weekly over secure, HIPAA-compliant Zoom video chat for 90 minutes to craft and rehearse a drama. This drama, at the conclusion of the 12 weeks, was performed in person or through live stream for the general public. Throughout the sessions, various measurements were conducted to assess the feasibility and acceptability of the program. Some examples of what was measured and analyzed included severity of symptoms, social skills, emotional regulation, and level of interest and satisfaction with the CoATT model.



(Photo description): Screenshots from the two virtual public performances

Participants of the most recent groups have chosen themes such as "Lost & Found: A Message of Hope," and inspired by their own mental health journeys. Or they have joined us for "Its Bean a Journey" a fictional story that captures the theme of perseverance, which mirrored the participant's own life lessons learned.

Following this program, participants shared that they felt drama therapy and the CoATT model improved how they felt about themselves and their feelings of empowerment. The program also allowed them to form fulfilling social bonds with the other participants. One participant noted that "the theme was kind of something that I was always thinking about because I knew we were working on this play together. So, like holding on to that theme of hope really gave me, like, inspiration to feel hopeful throughout the week." They found having an expressive outlet allowed them to share more of themselves with others. These two pilot programs that explored drama therapy for people with SMI have been published in the academic literature for more mental health providers, art therapists, and curious readers to learn about.

. With groups already completed, and more upon the horizon, UMass MIND aims to expand the treatment options available to those who suffer from SMI. Next steps include expanding to a multi-site installation where clubhouses from all over the US are able to take part in this new and exciting way to access treatment.

Cheung A, Agwu V, Stojcevski M, Wood L, Fan X. A pilot remote drama therapy program using the co-active therapeutic theater model with people with serious mental illness. *Community Mental Health Journal*, in press.

Cheung A, Reid-Varley W, Chiang M, Villemejeane M, Wood L, Butler J, Fan X. Dual diagnosis theatre: a pilot drama therapy study for individuals with serious mental illness and co-occurring substance use disorder. *Schizophrenia Research*, 2021; 230, 95-97. PMID: 33191082.

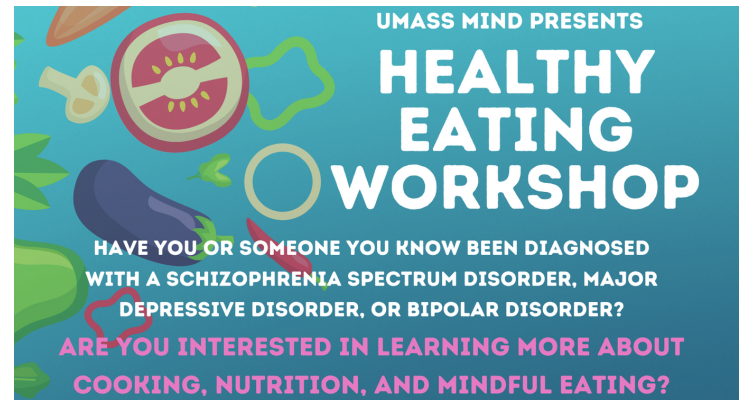
# COMMUNITY

## UMass MIND Receives Three Remillard Awards For Community-Based Interventions by Tarynn Pacheco

UMass MIND has recently received funding for three of our community intervention projects from the Remillard Family Community Service Fund. Funding is set aside for projects carried out by UMass Chan Medical School which are deemed worthwhile in expanding the medical school's community impact. Support from this funding aims to improve the health of residents in the Worcester community and particularly those who are underserved by increasing access to health education. Each of our community initiative projects are intended to improve the mental wellness and physical health of people living with serious mental illness (SMI).

The **Community Education and Mentoring Project (CEMP)**, which is a part of our Early Detection and Intervention Module, seeks to provide peer support for young people with mental health struggles and assist in the early detection of symptoms of SMI. Early detection is integral in improving treatment outcomes for people with schizophrenia. CEMP is open to people in late high school or early college years, the time at which the typical onset of symptoms occurs. By increasing access to mental health resources, we will increase awareness surrounding SMI symptoms and help people with lived experience receive early treatment to improve their the long-term outcomes.

**Food4Thought**, a program conducted by our Healthy Living Module, seeks to improve access to education surrounding diet and physical health. This project features two key components: an educational session and a directed hands-on cooking session. The original



design of the program was developed by UMass MIND and people with SMI and community members that support them! In the educational sessions, participants learn how to better nourish their bodies and understand hunger and fullness cues. Session topics include eating healthy on a budget, mindful eating, and the effect of diet on mental and physical health. In the hands-on cooking sessions, participants cook alongside members of UMass MIND to create healthy dishes based on what they have learned from the education sessions.

In UMass MIND's Arts and Music Module, funding went towards our **drama therapy** initiative which seeks to promote community-based drama therapy in treating SMI. Access to expressive therapies are not currently covered under most insurances, and it is our goal to improve access to such interventions.

With support from this funding, we will broaden our outreach in the Greater Worcester community and continue to work toward improving the health of our community members living with SMI.

# GLOBAL

## COVID's Impact on the Mental Health Crisis in China: Is AI a Possible Solution? by Brenna Chuang

In recent years, mental health awareness has gained much needed traction in China. The COVID-19 pandemic and China's strict and large-scale lockdown response has exacerbated the country's need for more widely available mental health treatment. Shanghai's two-month lockdown in April 2022 has added increased strain to the mental health of residents, resulting in heightened anxiety, depression, and loneliness. The pandemic has also spurred greater demand for the development of mental health services and resources in China.



## COVID's Impact on the Mental Health Crisis in China: Is AI a Possible Solution? Cont.

Dr. Xiaoduo Fan, professor of psychiatry at UMass Chan Medical School and director of the UMass China Mental Health Program, was featured by two Washington Post articles regarding the mental health crisis in China. One Washington Post article focused on the toll China's lockdown policy has placed on mental health, and Dr. Fan weighed in on how the lockdown has revealed faults in the healthcare system. Throughout the lockdown, the prevalence of depression has increased, and the number of searches for mental health help has skyrocketed. Despite the increased need for mental health services, only a small fraction of residents receive treatment. Dr. Fan notes that, "A lot of people don't get that there is no health without mental health and that mental health is for everybody, not just people with severe depression or significant behavioral issues." He emphasizes that participation from the government through efforts such as increasing public awareness and workforce development is needed to fully address this crisis.

Because there is such a great need for mental health resources, and even more so with the strain of the pandemic, China has seen several new artificial intelligence (AI) initiatives for mental health. In the second Washington Post article, the use of such technologies was discussed.

One ongoing project uses an algorithm to flag concerning comments under posts on Weibo, a popular Chinese social media



(Photo Credit: Olivia Falcigno for The Washington Post)

platform for microblogging. This technology flags users who are potentially at risk of harming themselves and then employs volunteers to call their families or support networks to check on these users with the aim of preventing suicide. Dr. Fan notes that these technologies are promising, but there needs to be more clinical evidence to support their use and regulations to ensure they are used ethically. While initiatives like these AI-based projects are on the rise in China, these programs serve to supplement professional psychiatric care and, alone, will not solve the overarching mental health crisis.

- Shepherd, C., & Chiang, V. (2022, May 19). Shanghai faces mental health crisis as covid lockdown drags on. The Washington Post. Retrieved July 25, 2022, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/05/19/china-covid-lockdown-shanghai-mental-health-crisis>
- Tan, R., & Chen, A. (2021, August 14). China's mental health system has long been inadequate. Can AI change that? The Washington Post. Retrieved July 25, 2022, from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/mental-health-china-ai/2021/08/12/7491caa2-ee7e-11eb-81b2-9b7061a582d8\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/mental-health-china-ai/2021/08/12/7491caa2-ee7e-11eb-81b2-9b7061a582d8_story.html)

## Ongoing Research

### Substance Use Study

The purpose of this 12 week investigator-initiated study is to see whether Brexpiprazole, an FDA approved antipsychotic medication for schizophrenia treatment, may help reduce substance use in individuals with schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder. This study is 3 months in length with weekly meetings. Participants will be compensated for their time.

### Negative Symptom Study

Are you or someone you know living with schizophrenia and struggling with negative symptoms such as spending less time with other people or lack of interest in things? The 15-week Negative Symptom study seeks to determine if an investigational medication, AVP-786, is effective in improving negative symptoms. Participants will be compensated for their time.

If you are interested or would like more information about any of our studies, please call 508-856-MIND (6463) or email [MIND@umassmed.edu](mailto:MIND@umassmed.edu)

In person visits are conducted at 26 Queen Street, Worcester, MA 01610.