

ARTA Makes Searching for the Right Residential Treatment Program Easier

by Edwin I. Levin, L.I.C.S.W.

There is a wide range of privately financed residential treatment options for adults with psychiatric disorders. Historically, it has been difficult to find these programs and sort out which might be appropriate. The American Residential Treatment Association (ARTA) makes this task a little less daunting.

Formed in 1992, ARTA is an association of independent residential programs for adults with mental illness. Its mission is to promote mental health and dual diagnosis treatment in residential settings. The association's web site, www.ARTAusa.org, lists and briefly describes the 25 members of ARTA and features links to each program's web site. Having a number of options in one place simplifies the task, but how does one decide which program is the best fit?

Because each program affiliated with ARTA is unique in regard to setting, activities, treatment services and values, there are many variables to consider. A good fit reflects not only an effective matching of the program's services to the individual's needs, but also corresponds to timing, the person's (and the family's) readiness, the nature of the psychiatric challenges, geographic location, cost and other factors. In general, residential programs can be divided into four broad categories: Farm-based residential communities, group residential treatment, apartment based residential treatment and long-term residential living arrangements. Programs in one category may have features of another. For example, a group residential treatment program may offer apartment-based treatment as clients become ready for that, or a farm-based program may offer group living in an urban area.

Other variables to consider within these categories include:

- . Peer group factors such as age, gender, range of disability
- . Degree and nature of structure (rules, program policies, activities, etc.)
- . Primary therapeutic approaches
- . Intensity and depth of treatment
- . Comprehensiveness and integration of services
- . Expectations of the residents
- . Family support services
- . Fee structure

To become informed, go to www.ARTAusa.org and see which programs seem like they might be a good fit. From there, explore various programs' web sites, jot down your questions and then call the ones you want. Consider not only the information you receive, but also the level of responsiveness of the staff member with whom you speak.

As a family member, your perspective is valid and represents a unique view into your loved one's ups and downs over the long haul. Be prepared to share information about, and to, your family member. Be forthright and honest with everyone, and resist the temptation to "sell" your family member to a program because you associate that program with hope. If your family member and a specific program are not a match, ARTA members will generally suggest other options. As long as you are a good detective, remain open-minded and persistent, one or two programs will emerge as the ones to pursue and potentially visit.

A final and very important point: these programs are most effective with the voluntary collaboration of the person who will be participating in the program. We always encourage families to enlist their loved one as a partner in the selection of a program. This is an active, concrete step in pulling one's life together. Before visiting, it is sometimes helpful to make available the program's web site and literature, and to encourage your family member to jot down some questions or concerns that he or she might have about the day-to-day aspects of the program.

ARTA members are here to help you understand the many facets of residential treatment and to provide helpful, relevant information in response to your family's situation.

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