

Service Design Site Visit Report Executive Summary

River Edge Behavioral Health
Macon, Georgia



Date of Site Visit: April 23–24, 2013

Prepared by JBS International, Inc., under Contract No. HHSS28320070000311HHSS28300002T

Prepared for the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment



River Edge Behavioral Health

Grantee Name	River Edge Behavioral Health
Address	175 Emery Highway, Macon, GA 31217
Site Visit Dates	April 23–24, 2013
Program Name	I-Care
Grant TI Number	TI11-0023827
Grantee Contact Person	Ail Yallah, Project Director
Government Project Officer	Kathryn Wetherby
Site Visit Team Members	Dave Wanser, Ph.D., and Afriika McKinnon

Grantee Project Team Members	
Shannon Harvey	Chief Executive Officer
Miranda Nunez	Chief Clinical Officer
Ali Yallah	Project Director
Charles Martin	Evaluation
Haly Hicks	Evaluation
Tammy Beall	Program Assistant
Sid Tobias	IT Team
Rick Riley	IT Team

Grantee Project Sites Visited	
River Edge Behavioral Health	175 Emery Highway, Macon, GA 31217



Ali Yallah,
Project Director



River Edge Behavioral Health Team

Executive Summary

River Edge Behavioral Health (River Edge) is a 63-year-old provider agency with services in 15 different, mostly rural, locations. The services provided include Assertive Community Treatment; adult day services; adult outpatient services; child, adolescent, and family services;

River Edge Behavioral Health is located in rural Macon, Georgia. The large facility, formerly a country mall, now offers a plethora of services, including child care, residential treatment, and recovery centers.

community support services; crisis intervention services; developmental services; pharmacy services; outpatient services for women with children; recovery centers; supported employment; and prevention resources. River Edge is one of the leading behavioral health providers in Georgia. Its mission is to “provide comprehensive mental health, addictive disease, and developmental disabilities services.” River Edge provides

services to more than 10,000 children, adolescents, and adults in Bibb, Baldwin, Jones, Monroe, Putnam, Twiggs, Wilkinson, and surrounding counties. The agency accepts Medicaid, Medicare, and most private insurance and offers a sliding-scale fee for individuals without insurance.

Under the direction of project director Ali Yallah, and with the vision of chief executive officer Shannon Harvey, the program has implemented telehealth, I-Care Recovery Network (I-Care), and Smoke Signal (reminder system); it has also created a computer lab for clients. The telemedicine software used is Veamea, a low-cost, dependable Microsoft product. I-Care, a Web portal based through the World Press platform, uses innovative technology to provide, expand, and enhance effective communications with individuals in substance abuse treatment



Shannon Harvey, CEO

and with community partners. The program also provides clients with the ability to track and manage their wellness and recovery. The Web portal aims to improve integrated, coordinated, person-centered services delivery through Web-based and electronic applications. I-Care seeks to increase service access, improve processes, remove barriers to care, and provide needed education to increase awareness and improve self-management of care for more than 415 clients spread across more than 10 counties in Central and Northeast Georgia. The Smoke Signal client reminder system provides digital telephone services to remind clients of upcoming appointments. River Edge also created a computer room in its outpatient and residential program so clients can have access to the Web portal and other technology innovations. The client

computer room is equipped with the newest technologies and allows users all-day access. Individuals can also receive computer training if needed.

A site visit was conducted at River Edge on April 23 and 24, 2013, to review accomplishments and identify potential areas where technical assistance may enhance the program. The site visit provided the opportunity to meet with staff members from across the organization and observe firsthand the technology used by participants in the grant-funded program. The site visit team

received a program overview and discussed implementation and the service delivery model. This was followed by a meeting with the evaluation team and a review of the evaluation plan. The review included Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) and other data collection, protocols for GPRA enrollment and followup, and use of data to support quality improvement and sustainability activities. The team also met with four clients receiving services, and discussed the effects of clients' use of technology on services provided, both in general and specifically.

The team identified numerous programmatic strengths. River Edge has passionate, well-educated, and dedicated staff who are proactive in the use of health information technologies. Having a project director who is an IT professional has been a factor instrumental in the adoption of technological innovations. The IT team, in collaboration with clinical services leadership, uses a forward-thinking and outcome-oriented approach. The telehealth services work on virtually any platform with any bandwidth. The site visit team witnessed a wireless laptop-to-PC demonstration of telehealth services on a traditional server and observed no issues with connectivity. In partnership with View Point Health, technologies funded through this grant can be made available to individuals with substance use disorders residing in north Georgia counties. Viewpoint Health is impressed with the telehealth services provided by River Edge but noted that additional upgrades could be made to the newly launched Web portal. River Edge has recently expanded its services to any client with a substance abuse diagnosis, and thus with this expansion of services the number of clients seen under this grant could significantly increase.

The project leadership team includes the chief executive officer, chief compliance officer, project director, addictions counselor, and IT team. The program has a strong and highly involved evaluation team that aims to add additional technology surveys and reports to address programmatic needs. The program leadership also understands the potential effects of the Affordable Care Act and is working on a strategic plan to address its effects.

The strengths mentioned above, coupled with a dedicated group of staff members supporting the program, provide a solid foundation for continued growth. Although there are challenges in the areas of GPRA rates, work flow, Web portal functionality, and health care reform readiness, River Edge plans to improve in these areas by requesting technical assistance to aid efforts. The program also has excellent ideas for long-term sustainability, with plans to bill for telehealth services.

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River Edge Behavioral Health

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*Ali Yallah,
Project Director*



River Edge Behavioral Health Team

Grantee Overview and Environmental Context

River Edge Behavioral Health (River Edge) is a 63-year-old provider agency with services in 15 separate, mostly rural, locations. The services provided include Assertive Community Treatment; adult day services; adult outpatient services; child, adolescent, and family services; community support services; crisis intervention services; developmental services;

River Edge Behavioral Health is located in rural Macon, Georgia. The large facility, formerly a country mall, now offers a plethora of services, including child care, residential treatment, and recovery centers.

pharmacy services; outpatient services for women with children; recovery centers; supported employment; and prevention resources. River Edge is one of the leading behavioral health providers in Georgia. Its mission is to “provide comprehensive mental health, addictive disease, and developmental disabilities services.” River Edge provides services to more than 10,000 children, adolescents, and adults

in Bibb, Baldwin, Jones, Monroe, Putnam, Twiggs, Wilkinson, and surrounding counties. The agency accepts Medicaid, Medicare, and most private insurance and offers a sliding-scale fee for individuals without insurance.

Under the direction of project director Ali Yallah and with the vision of chief executive officer Shannon Harvey, the project has implemented the telehealth I-Care Recovery Network (I-Care) and a reminder system called Smoke Signal; it has also established a computer lab for clients. The telemedicine software used is Veamea, a low-cost, dependable Microsoft product. I-Care, a Web portal based within the World Press platform, uses innovative technology to provide, expand, and enhance effective communications with individuals in substance abuse treatment



Shannon Harvey, CEO

and community partners. The portal also enables clients to track and manage their wellness and recovery. The Web portal aims to improve integrated, coordinated, person-centered service delivery through Web-based and electronic applications. I-Care seeks to increase service access, improve processes, remove barriers to care, and provide needed education to increase awareness and improve self-management of care for more than 415 clients spread across more than 10 counties in central and northeast Georgia. The Smoke Signal client reminder system provides a digital telephone messaging service to remind clients of upcoming appointments. River Edge has also created a computer room in its outpatient and residential programs so clients can have access to the Web portal and other technology innovations to further supplement their recovery. The client

computer room is equipped with the newest technologies and facilitates all-day access. Individuals may also receive computer training if needed.

1. Site Visit Overview

The JBS International, Inc., team conducted a site visit to River Edge on April 23–24, 2013, to review accomplishments and identify potential areas where technical assistance may enhance the program. The site visit provided the opportunity to meet with staff members from across the organization and observe firsthand the technology used by participants in the grant-funded program. The site visit team received a program overview and discussed implementation and the service delivery model. This was followed by a meeting with the evaluation team and a review of the evaluation plan. The review included Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) and other data collection tools, protocols for GPRA enrollment and followup, and use of data to support quality improvement and sustainability activities. The team also met with four clients receiving services and discussed the clients' use of technology and the effects of technology on services provided.

The team identified numerous programmatic strengths. River Edge has passionate, experienced, and dedicated staff proactive in the use of health information technology (IT). The project director is an IT professional who has facilitated the adoption of technological innovations throughout the organization. The IT team, in collaboration with clinical services leadership, uses a forward-thinking and outcome-oriented approach. The telehealth services operate on virtually any platform with any bandwidth. The site visit team witnessed a wireless laptop-to-PC demonstration of telehealth services on a traditional server and observed no issues with connectivity. In partnership with View Point Health, technologies funded through this grant can be made available to individuals with substance use disorders residing in north Georgia counties. Viewpoint Health is impressed with the telehealth services provided by River Edge but noted that additional upgrades could be made to the newly launched Web portal. River Edge has recently expanded its services to any client with a substance abuse diagnosis, and with this expansion, the number of clients seen could significantly increase.

A fully staffed leadership team includes the chief executive officer, chief compliance officer, project director, addictions counselor, and IT team. The program has a strong and highly involved evaluation team that aims to add additional technology surveys and reports to address programmatic needs. The program leadership also understands the impact of health care reform and is working on a strategic plan to address its effects.

The strengths mentioned above, coupled with a dedicated staff, provide a solid foundation for the continued growth of the program. Although there are challenges in the areas of GPRA rates, work flow, Web portal functionality, and Affordable Care Act readiness, River Edge plans to improve in these areas by requesting technical assistance. The program also has excellent ideas for long-term sustainability, including plans to bill for telehealth services.

2. Program Vision and Design

River Edge has been aggressive in investing in technologies that will support efficient and coordinated clinical services to the populations served. This investment has included staffing a robust IT department and having sufficient technological capacity to ensure the applications in place operate effectively. The investments made for the Technology-Assisted Care grant extend this practice with the use of telehealth and messaging software. River Edge has also been proactive in ensuring clients can use technology-enhanced services by providing a computer laboratory and staff support to assist in gaining requisite computer skills, including a self-paced goal-setting and tracking software tool.

3. Grantee Leadership

River Edge has more than 63 years of experience as one of the leading behavioral health providers in the State of Georgia. The organization provides state-of-the-art prevention, treatment, and support services for children, youth, families, and adults who experience mental illness, addiction, co-occurring disorders, or developmental disabilities across seven Georgia counties (Bibb, Baldwin, Jones, Monroe, Putnam, Twiggs, and Wilkinson). River Edge is staffed with team members who are passionate, dedicated, and progressive. The project lead is a credentialed IT project manager with the ability to ensure the innovative technology is effectively implemented, while meeting user requirements. The chief executive officer has held senior positions in provider organizations and has worked with many agencies throughout the State. With its strong leadership capabilities, Rivers Edge has been awarded numerous grants, including a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant for supportive housing. Since November 2010, River Edge has offered telehealth services, and 15 of its treatment centers have the ability to provide technology-enhanced services. The telehealth system enables doctors, nurses, and social workers to consult remotely and provide diagnosis and intervention services to clients through secured teleconferencing. With an Internet connection, clients can now be assessed and treated by one of River Edge's clinicians from practically anywhere via laptop and Webcam.

4. Implementation Plan

River Edge's headquarters in Macon, Georgia, houses the telecare and technology enhancement services and serves as the network hub for all the other sites. This arrangement facilitates an organized and effective point of coordination for oversight and assistance to customers as needed. River Edge has other notable implementation strengths, providing telecare services using Veamea, a Microsoft product that is secure and compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. Veamea is a videoconferencing and collaboration platform that "allows people across the globe to work together as if they were

sitting in the same room.” Veamea is relatively low in cost and can operate in teleconferencing arrangements; on laptops; and over IP, wireless, and 3G networks. River Edge has added additional technologies, such as the Smoke Signal patient reminder voice messaging system, a Web portal, and a computer lab, to enhance services to clients. Future rollouts will include enhancing the current Web portal with chat features, blogs, and peer support services to help clients when a counselor is unavailable.

The River Edge Web site could do more to promote the value of the technology being implemented. If a client were interested in accessing services, it would be difficult to find out about the program other than from a clinician or staff member in a group home or residential setting. River Edge may benefit from enhancing its Web site to include information pertaining to the various technologies offered to individuals admitted. River Edge is not currently meeting its GPRA targets but is projected to meet the GPRA intake requirement by the next reporting period.

The followup rates are also less than favorable. River Edge is currently seeing an array of clients, many in short-term transitional programs, who become difficult to reach after the treatment episode has ended. With multiple assessment requirements at intake, clients must provide extensive information. The lengthy process may contribute to dropout and followup issues and affect the project’s ability to meet GPRA targets. When all assessments are complete, River Edge provides clients with a “letter of completion” before all the GPRA data have been acquired. River Edge may benefit from streamlining data collection processes and providing the “letter of completion” to clients after they have fulfilled the GPRA requirement.

Potential Enhancements		Grantee Resources To Be Used	Will Request TA From CSAT	Information Requested
1	Streamline data collection and limit data collection burden at intake by eliminating redundant assessment questions and collecting data over a period of time rather than all at once.		X	
2	Delay the “letter of completion” until after all data have been acquired over the four-visit time frame.	X		
3	Use YouTube or other video platforms to market technology on the Web site as part of an overall marketing strategy to draw clients into the program.	X		
4	Identify a clinical champion to support marketing efforts for new clients.	X		
5	Include quick response (QR) codes on brochures to cater marketing efforts to specific audiences, including current clients.	X		
6	Add peer support services to aid with followup efforts.		X	

5. Community Linkages, Partners, and Participation

The River Edge chief executive officer has a strong professional relationship with the primary care, mental health, substance abuse, and social service providers throughout the State of Georgia. River Edge has partnered with Viewpoint Health, an organization that provides services in the southern metro Atlanta region (DeKalb, Gwinnett, Newton, and Rockdale counties). Viewpoint Health is one of 27 agencies created by the State of Georgia to provide care for behavioral health and developmental disabilities. It provides individual and group counseling, medication management, and recovery and crisis stabilization services. Formerly known as the Gwinnett, Rockdale, and Newton Community Services Board, Viewpoint Health has been in operation since 1994. This strong partnership results in many referrals from the metro region of Georgia. River Edge also has an active board of directors. The JBS team spoke briefly with one board member (Debora Tool Vinson) who shared the chief executive officer's excitement with the progress and direction of River Edge's future in technology.

6. Client Outreach, Recruitment, and Referral

River Edge has expanded access to its telehealth services and Web portal to any client with a substance use disorder. This allows anyone who enters River Edge's doors to potentially receive these services. The group homes and the residential facilities have piloted use of the Web portal. Counselors are actively engaged in the telehealth services and frequently refer clients to the program. Projections have been made that River Edge will meet GPRA intake requirements by the next reporting period. However, the River Edge Web site does not promote the value of the technology that could lead to future recruitment and referral sources. River Edge may benefit from revamping and marketing its Web site to further referrals.

Potential Enhancements		Grantee Resources To Be Used	Will Request TA From CSAT	Information Requested
1	Use technology to market technology and show potential clients the possibilities available through the use of the Web portal and other tools.	X		
2	Include QR codes on brochures to focus marketing efforts on specific audiences, including clients.	X		

Potential Enhancements		Grantee Resources To Be Used	Will Request TA From CSAT	Information Requested
3	Add enhancements to the Web portal to include more client activities, such as discussion boards, chat rooms, mobile applications, and email.	X	X	

7. Affordable Care Act Readiness

With the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, River Edge is actively engaged in Affordable Care Act readiness discussions and is seeking a plan to ensure its compliance with health care improvements. River Edge is contemplating strategies that will enable it to achieve stage 2 meaningful use goals. The project director is an IT manager who has a strong relationship with the clinicians and team members. Together, the team is in a position to develop cost-effective, modern, and user-friendly tools to enhance services to clients. River Edge, however, does not currently have a viable electronic health record (EHR) system to meet needs in the emerging health reform environment. The organization could benefit from technical assistance to create a strategy for selecting an appropriate EHR and an overall data strategy to facilitate the desired goals in the health care system.

Potential Enhancements		Grantee Resources To Be Used	Will Request TA From CSAT	Information Requested
1	Develop a data strategic plan to determine needs for a new EHR system.		X	X
2	Develop an Affordable Care Act strategic plan aimed at becoming a Medicaid health home.		X	X

8. Sustainability Planning

River Edge has a long-term business plan that incorporates partnering with other provider organizations, ensuring a committed board of directors, retaining and recruiting qualified staff, marketing services to new audiences, and expanding the service area by incorporating telehealth capabilities to be accessible to individuals in need of services. The organization is developing a strategy to ensure needed competencies for success in all aspects of the Affordable Care Act that will be relevant in the coming years.

9. Grantee Evaluation

River Edge has a comprehensive project evaluation plan and has hired a doctorate-level evaluator from the local university to engage in planning, implementation, and improvement of the grant. Performance reports and monthly meetings are used to provide evaluation data that inform and monitor the success of the grant program. The evaluators do not currently collect information outside the standard GPRA data requirements. Since GPRA does not address technology use, exploring measures to determine technology effectiveness could be valuable.

Potential Enhancements		Grantee Resources To Be Used	Will Request TA From CSAT	Information Requested
1	Add evaluation questions that capture technology effectiveness.		X	

Strengths and Considerations for Actions

Grantee Leadership

STRENGTHS

- River Edge has more than 63 years of experience providing mental health and treatment services to youth and families throughout Georgia.
- River Edge is one of the leading behavioral health providers in the State of Georgia and provides a comprehensive array of services.
- River Edge has more than 15 treatment centers, all with the ability to provide technology-enhanced services.
- River Edge is staffed with team members who are passionate, dedicated, and forward thinking.
- The project lead is a credentialed IT project manager with the ability to ensure the innovative technology is effectively implemented and meets user requirements.

CHALLENGES

- None noted.

Potential Enhancements		Grantee Resources To Be Used	Will Request TA From CSAT	Information Requested
1	NA			

Implementation Plan

STRENGTHS

- River Edge provides telecare services using VeaMea, a Microsoft product that is secure and compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.
- River Edge has added additional technologies (Smoke Signal, a Web portal, and a computer lab) to enhance services to clients.
- River Edge counselors provide traditional services and telehealth services.
- River Edge has opened the telehealth and Web portal to any client with a substance use disorder.
- Projections indicate River Edge will meet GPRA intake requirements by next reporting period.

CHALLENGES

- The River Edge intake design requires clients to fill out extensive paperwork at intake, which may affect the project's ability to meet the GPRA target.
- River Edge provides clients with a "letter of completion" before all GPRA data have been acquired, which appears to affect followup data collection.
- River Edge has difficulty reaching the required GPRA followup target.
- The River Edge Web site does not promote the value of the technology.

Potential Enhancements		Grantee Resources To Be Used	Will Request TA From CSAT	Information Requested
1	Streamline data questions and ask clients over a period of time, rather than all at once, to limit the burden at intake.		X	
2	Delay the "letter of completion" until after all data have been acquired over the four-visit time frame.	X		
3	Use YouTube or other video platforms to market technology on the Web site as part of an overall marketing strategy to draw clients into the program.	X		
4	Identify a clinical champion to support marketing efforts for new clients.	X		
5	Include quick response (QR) codes on brochures to cater marketing efforts to specific audiences, including clients.	X		
6	Add peer support services to aid with followup efforts.		X	

Community Linkages, Partners, and Participation

STRENGTHS

- The River Edge chief executive officer has a strong professional relationship with the primary care, mental health, substance abuse, and social service providers throughout the State of Georgia.
- River Edge has partnered with Viewpoint Health.
- River Edge has an active board of directors.

CHALLENGES

- None noted.

Potential Enhancements		Grantee Resources To Be Used	Will Request TA From CSAT	Information Requested
1	NA			

Client Outreach, Recruitment, and Referral

STRENGTHS

- River Edge has expanded access to the telehealth and Web portal to any client with a substance use disorder.
- Projections indicate River Edge will meet GPRA intake requirement by the next reporting period.
- Counselors are actively engaged and refer clients to the program.

CHALLENGES

- The River Edge Web site does not promote the value of the technology that could lead to future recruitment and referral sources.

Potential Enhancements		Grantee Resources To Be Used	Will Request TA From CSAT	Information Requested
1	Use technology to market technology and show potential clients what is possible through the use of the Web portal and other tools.	X		
2	Include QR codes on brochures to focus marketing efforts on specific audiences, including clients.	X		
3	Add enhancements to the Web portal to include more client activities such as discussion boards, chat rooms, mobile applications, and email.		X	

Affordable Care Act Readiness

STRENGTHS

- River Edge is staffed with experienced IT specialists.
- The chief executive officer is actively engaged in the Affordable Care Act readiness discussion in Georgia and is seeking a plan to reach stage 3 meaningful use goals.
- River Edge currently bills for services, and staff understand how these processes operate.

CHALLENGES

- River Edge does not have a viable EHR system.

Potential Enhancements		Grantee Resources To Be Used	Will Request TA From CSAT	Information Requested
1	Develop a data strategic plan to determine needs for a new EHR system.		X	X
2	Develop an Affordable Care Act strategic plan aimed at becoming a medical health home practitioner.		X	X

Program Evaluation

STRENGTHS

- The River Edge evaluators have been comprehensively engaged in all planning and implementation of the technology-assisted care grant.
- River Edge has a comprehensive project evaluation plan and has an evaluator in place.

CHALLENGES

- River Edge evaluators do not currently ask questions outside the standard GPRA requirement. GPRA does not address technology use.

Potential Enhancements		Grantee Resources To Be Used	Will Request TA From CSAT	Information Requested
1	Add a questionnaire that addresses additional technology evaluation questions to determine effective uses of technology.		X	

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACA	(Patient Protection and) Affordable Care Act
CSAT	Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
EHR	Electronic health record
GPRA	Government Performance and Results Act
I-Care	I-Care Recovery Network
IT	Information technology
QR	Quick response