



# Media Release

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## Utah PASSAGE Program Receives Prestigious Youth in Transition Award

SALT LAKE CITY – Nineteen-year-old Camille Houston has a message for other struggling teens: “Recovery from mental illness is possible and I am living proof.” After years of grappling with the crippling effects of a mental disorder including months of hospitalization, Camille is now well on her way to responsible adulthood. Her healthy transition is, in large part, due to the help she received through the Partnership for Youth in Transition Initiative administered by the Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (DSAMH).

PASSAGE—an acronym for Progressive Adulthood: Skills, Support, Advocacy, Growth, and Empowerment—is the enhanced 2009 version of the same initiative which offers a services and support network to young people with special mental health needs during the transition to adulthood, a particularly critical juncture in their lives. Under PASSAGE, the initiative will be able to reach into two new counties—San Juan and Tooele—and will pay special attention to the diverse cultural groups within those communities, e.g. Native Americans and Hispanics.

“The good news for the transition initiative,” says Ming Wang, DSAMH’s Project Director for Youth in Transition, “is that we’ve just been awarded new funding—\$480,000 per year for up to five years to continue our work in this area. In this time of economic tightening and budget cuts, we’re gratified that SAMHSA has recognized the success we’re having in providing services to this segment of our population.”

With the previous federal grant, Wang and her team of DSAMH staff and community partners have been able to serve 275 youth from Weber, Davis, Salt Lake and Utah Counties. In the communities served, high school graduation rates and employment increased; homelessness decreased; and residential and in-patient psychiatric treatment decreased; while mental health functioning improved. These measurements are significant because the transition initiative focuses not just on the mental disability, but looks at the whole person—as a student, a job-holder and family member.

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