

The Art of Hillview "Mumera"

By Winona McCollum

From the time she was a child, Winona McCollum felt compelled to write and illustrate stories. Whenever she had a chance, Winona would grab paper and start drawing. She has created richly imagined fantasy worlds, including the one from which this character, named Mumera, originates.

Asked what she enjoys about creating art, Winona says she likes having total control and not being constrained by any creative limitations. She also enjoys putting a face to her characters, bringing them - and her stories - to life.

Winona came to Hillview's Independent Living Program after transitioning out of the county's foster youth program about two years ago. Now, she is shifting to the center's Full Service Partnership for Transitional Age Youth.

An animal lover, Winona helps care for rescue animals at a local pet store's weekend adoption events.



President/CEO:
Eva S. McCraven, Ph.D.

Director of Community & Public Relations:
Sande Weiss

The mission of Hillview Mental Health Center, Inc., is to assist in empowering individuals and families affected by mental illness to assess their needs, strengths and goals, and work collaboratively with mental health professionals and other staff to plan services that are person-centered, culturally competent, and effective in promoting recovery and the ability to live as fully participating members of the community.

Hillview Mental Health Center, Inc., is a nonprofit corporation that serves as a gateway to recovery, independence and health for nearly 2,000 East San Fernando Valley residents each year.

website: www.hillviewmhc.org
phone: 818.896.1161
e-mail: info@hillviewmhc.org



From Jail to the Streets What We Do for People Who Are Mentally Ill, Unemployable and Not Qualified for Public Housing

Message from Eva S. McCraven
President and Chief Executive Officer

Hillview Mental Health Center housed people who have serious mental illness and substance use disorders for most of the 50 years since our founding in 1966. We have used a borrowed church, rented houses, created licensed community care facilities, rented apartments, built a village of 75 permanent housing units, and operated transitional facilities.

Psychiatrically unstable and vulnerable to substance abuse while they were being medically stabilized, receiving medical care and getting disability benefits in place. Our housing also enabled us to take people directly from jail to housing where they remained accessible to Hillview staff, who linked them to services, entitlements and transportation. We were able to keep them safe while helping them with the lengthy and complicated process of obtaining housing vouchers.

We are hearing of other agencies in Los Angeles and elsewhere in the state who are dealing with the change of the definition.

I ask mental health leaders, legislators and our Board of Supervisors to advocate for an addition to the category of shelters that can be used to transition homeless people with serious mental illness and people released from jail and other institutions. This could be called Safe Harbor Housing and it would allow us to keep our clients safe and available for mental health and medical care and accessible while they are being assisted with the lengthy application process, which requires traveling to downtown Los Angeles. I celebrate current proposals to build new housing. However, without a bridge to permanent housing we will see more people living in the street and they will be the most vulnerable of our homeless population.

Hillview Mental Health Center's CEO, from the early seventies until his death in 2012, created these housing arrangements. Carl C. McCraven acted on the obvious fact that people with mental illness need a place to shelter if they are to be available for mental health services and assistance with obtaining necessities of daily living.

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chiatrically unstable and vulnerable to substance abuse while they were being medically stabilized, receiving medical care and getting disability benefits in place. Our housing also enabled us to take people directly from jail to housing where they remained accessible to Hillview staff, who linked them to services, entitlements and transportation. We were able to keep them safe while helping them with the lengthy and complicated process of obtaining housing vouchers.

12450 Van Nuys Blvd., Suite 200
Pacoima, CA 91331

A nonprofit corporation serving the
East San Fernando Valley since 1966

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Homelessness Forum Draws State and Local Leaders



On March 3, 2016, Hillview Mental Health Center convened the Valley Homelessness Forum to discuss the extent of the problem and new initiatives designed to provide coordinated solutions. More than 150 individuals attended the event, which featured speakers from state, county and city governments. The forum took place at the Greater Community Missionary Baptist Church in Pacoima, which is currently serving as a homeless shelter, operated by Hope of the Valley.

Dr. Eva McCraven, President/CEO of Hillview Mental Health Center, Inc., said the forum was planned to encourage the unprecedented collaboration currently taking place between government officials of Los Angeles County, the City of Los Angeles and California legislators. The gathering was designed to keep up momentum generated by a housing summit organized in December by Los Angeles Family Housing, attended by over 200 people.

Dr. McCraven noted that the San Fernando Valley has the largest geographic distribution of poverty and homelessness in the county, concentrated in the East Valley and also in scattered communities throughout the San Fernando and Santa Clarita Valleys. The wide geographic distribution of homeless people makes service coordination and follow-up even more challenging, particularly if they are suffering from mental illness and/or are newly released from incarceration.

"Current planning tends to focus on concentrated pockets of homelessness, such as Skid Row and Santa Monica, but Valley communities, particularly in the East San Fernando Valley, have been neglected for too long," Dr. McCraven told the gathering. "Perhaps this is because our homeless population is not as visible."

"Homelessness is not just a national issue or a state issue or a city issue," said Senator Kevin de León, president pro tempore of the California State Senate. "It is everybody's issue. It is a human issue."

He described his bipartisan No Place Like Home Initiative, which would provide \$2 billion to build permanent housing for individuals with mental illness and \$200 million over four years to provide temporary rent subsidies.

On the county level, Phil Ansell, Homeless Initiative



director for Los Angeles County, explained the county's recently created comprehensive strategy to combat homelessness. The \$150 million initiative includes 47 recommendations designed to prevent homelessness, create a coordinated system and increase availability of affordable housing.

Los Angeles City Council member Gil Cedillo, chairperson of the city's Housing Committee, said that each day in Los Angeles 40,000 people sleep on the street, 6,000 of them children. He described the House LA Initiative, which includes seven proposals designed to address the homelessness and provide housing in the city of Los Angeles.

Other speakers included Miguel Santana, Los Angeles city administrator; Alisa Orduno, director of homelessness policy for Mayor Eric Garcetti; Molly Rysman, housing and homelessness deputy for supervisor Sheila Kuehl; and Maria Funk, district chief of the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health.

The speakers shared several common themes. One was that housing must be provided before the other needs of homeless individuals can effectively be addressed. Another was a call to decriminalize homelessness. There was also agreement about the need for a coordinated entry system that would enable homeless individuals to connect to services and receive ongoing supportive care coordination.

The federal definition of chronic homelessness was



Government officials and community members participated in the Valley Homelessness Forum convened by Hillview Mental Health Center. Pictured, clockwise from left: California State Senate President Pro Tempore Kevin de León; Alisa Orduno, Director of Homelessness Policy for Mayor Eric Garcetti, Miguel Santana, Los Angeles City Administrator, and Los Angeles City Councilmember Gil Cedillo; Dr. Eva McCraven, Senator Kevin de León and Hermes Ayala from California Assemblymember Patty Lopez's office; Pastor Dudley Chatman and Dr. Eva McCraven.

changed in January. A person must have a disability and have been living in a place not meant for human habitation, in an emergency shelter or in a safe haven for 12 months continuously or on at least four occasions in the last three years, where those occasions cumulatively total at least three months and are documented on agency letterhead. Stays in jail or other institutions longer than 90 days disqualify the individual for housing. This change in the definition of homelessness disqualifies Hillview clients who have been sheltered in Hillview's unique scattered-site housing from being placed in permanent housing units in Hillview Village. Officials at the forum noted that any changes, such as adding "bridge" temporary housing to the new definition, would have to be made at the federal level.

Retired state senator Richard Alarcon coordinated the event for Hillview. Alarcon shared that his son suffers from mental illness, is currently homeless and does not want to change his situation or receive treatment.

"We don't have the whole solution to homelessness," he said. "But we can make a lot of difference."



Helping Our Clients Get Housing



s Hillview Mental Health Center's housing specialist, Axel Cortes helps shepherd Hillview's homeless clients through the complicated process of applying for housing.

It's a difficult and complicated process for several reasons. First, in January the U.S. federal government changed the designation of homelessness to require that an individual "was living in a place not meant for human habitation, in an emergency shelter, or in a safe haven for the last 12 months continuously or on at least four occasions in the last three years, where those occasions cumulatively total at least 12 months."

Those conditions can be hard to meet. "It's heartbreaking to have to tell clients they have to live on the streets for an additional period of time in order to qualify for housing," says Cortes.

Second, the process requires filling out lengthy forms and assembling documentation that homeless individuals may not have on hand. Cortes says the application is close to 100 pages and can take one to two hours to complete under the best of circumstances. "Clients just want to get it done and can get overwhelmed," he says.

Often, paperwork is returned with requests for verification that can be difficult to produce. "I have to be like a detective, trying to figure out where they may have received services so we can get documentation that they were homeless at that time," says Cortes.

The process can take several weeks to several months. In the meantime, Cortes provides a list of resources such as food pantries, shower facilities and places to get a hot meal.

Case managers work with clients to provide services, such as therapy, case management and follow-up, but they are much more successful when clients have the stability of housing.

Hillview Mental Health Center has a few "bridge housing" beds to shelter adults and provide time for stabilization and mental health treatment during the application process. Because of the change in the definition of chronic homelessness, we are no longer able to utilize this resource without compromising homeless clients' eligibility for permanent housing.

Despite the challenges, Hillview has successfully helped obtain housing for many clients. "It's really a team effort," says Cortes. "It's very rewarding to see a client get housed."