

The Art of Hillview
 “Angel”
 by Sybil Bonsante

Like many of the residents of the Village, Sybil Bonsante has found a true home at Hillview. She found the inspiration for her ink drawing from another longtime resident, Angel. Although pets are not allowed on campus, Angel had other ideas when he arrived here as a kitten and decided to make Hillview his home.

“Angel will scratch at my window when he wants to come in, and he takes lots of naps in my apartment,” says Sybil. “He’s very affectionate and everybody here knows him.”

Art has always been a passion and creative outlet for Sybil, who worked as a make-up artist for cosmetics lines Clinique and Lancôme. The pen and ink drawing is her first of an animal, which she made as a gift for another resident who feeds Angel and takes him in at night. Sybil subsequently drew a second likeness of Angel, which sits proudly in her apartment. Both pieces were on display at Hillview’s recent Art Show.



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

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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.

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Giving Hope to Those on Society’s Fringes

*Message from Eva S. McCraven
 President and Chief Executive Officer*

Hillview’s Building D, a two-story bungalow in Hillview Village, is offering a haven for two groups of people with mental illness. These groups, which often overlap, are among the most marginalized in our society: those who have been incarcerated and those who are homeless.

Individuals with mental illness who have been convicted of a crime often find themselves in a vicious cycle. Rather than receiving the treatment they need in hospitals or mental health centers, they are housed in prisons and jails. In fact, the number of people with serious mental illness who are incarcerated exceeds the number in state psychiatric hospitals tenfold. Untreated, their psychiatric illnesses often worsen. So not only do these individuals tend to leave prison or jail in worse shape than when they entered, but they are also deprived of follow-up services to help them successfully reenter society.

AB 109

Assembly Bill (AB) 109 addresses this problem by shifting jurisdiction for low-level offenders from state prisons to county probation and sheriff departments. The idea is to offer local services and support that help these individuals transition back to their own communities. Here in Los Angeles County, Hillview is collaborating with the Probation Department’s East San Fernando Valley Office to fill this need. And given that nearly 25 percent of prison inmates have some form of mental illness, and 60 percent have substance abuse disorders, the need for such services is clear.

Hillview’s Unique Approach

In most instances, previously incarcerated individuals can choose to receive mental health services or housing, but not fill both critical needs in the same venue. All mental health centers cannot address the problem of homelessness. While recovery homes provide lodging and substance use services, they are sometimes not adequate venues for those with severe mental illness.

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Healing Is an Art for Dr. Peggy Wilson-Jordan



From paintings to sculptures to stained glass, artwork abounds in the office of Peggy Wilson-Jordan,

Ph.D., LMFT. It even graces Dr. Wilson-Jordan herself, in the form of colorful jewelry. Dr. Wilson-Jordan, who earned a master’s in art therapy before obtaining her doctorate in psychology, created most of the pieces herself.

Dr. Wilson-Jordan is program director for Hillview Mental Health Center’s Full Service Partnership for Transitional Age Youth and the Independent Living Program for Transitional Age Youth. The Full Service program serves individuals ages 16 to 25 with mental illness who need supportive services on a 24-hour basis at home or in the community. The Independent Living Program serves youths ages 18 to 21 who live semi-independently, in housing provided by Hillview.

As an artist, Dr. Wilson is attuned to seeing beauty that other people might miss, and this sensibility influences her approach to helping her young clients.

“I like working with troubled kids,” she says. “They are being punished

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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.

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A nonprofit corporation serving the
 East San Fernando Valley since 1966

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Giving Hope to Those on Society's Fringes

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At Hillview, we are able to address both needs, offering mental health services along with housing in the same location. Our unique mental health campus includes an outpatient treatment clinic, a clubhouse, a wellness center, an alternative crisis residential center and permanent housing for 75 adults.

Our pilot AB 109 housing program, managed by David Richards, ACSW, provides comprehensive support. Clients live in dorm-like accommodations with a community kitchen and recreation room. Case managers Alejandra Corona and Jeff Rich guide clients in formulating personal goals and objectives and connect them with community resources, such as schools and employment centers. Licensed Advanced Alcohol and Drug Counselor Maria Stone works with those who have substance abuse issues.

Currently, Hillview has five AB 109 consumers living on campus. Two are living in the residential building, and three are still undergoing stabilization in the Crisis Residential Facility. Forty-four others are receiving outpatient services at the treatment clinic. Five others are preparing to move to the campus residence.

This innovative model of support has already proven to be successful. Countywide, the arrest rate for individuals who are in treatment is 26 percent, versus 53 percent for those who are not in treatment. Here at Hillview, one housing program participant has completed his treatment and is in job training for a trucker's license. A second has also completed his treatment, is maintaining his sobriety and is actively looking for employment.

Help for the Chronically Homeless

Building D is also housing chronically homeless clients from the Sunland, Tujunga and Lakeview Terrace communities who have mental health and substance abuse issues. These individuals now benefit from stable housing, medical support, case management, substance abuse programs and linkage to other services such as vocational training. For the first time in years, they can regain hope for the future.

Healing Is an Art for Dr. Peggy Wilson-Jordan

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for behavior which is a result of traumas they were subjected to as kids. We help them realize they are here for a reason, that they have a purpose and that their job is to find it and go after it."

Dr. Wilson-Jordan notes that most of the young clients served by the two programs she supervises have experienced horrendous abuse, from witnessing a family member being killed to being set on fire by a parent. "People need to understand that our clients don't choose to be mentally ill or to stay drug addicted.

Many start doing drugs to escape how they feel as a result of their traumas," she says. "They haven't been taught that there are better coping skills. We help them unlearn poor coping skills and learn healthier ones."

Prior to working at Hillview, Dr. Wilson-Jordan ran the Mid-Valley Youth Center. The nonprofit organization offered residential treatment and full mental health and case management services for 84 adolescent boys and specialized in adolescent sex offenders.



Encouraging Artistic Expression



At Hillview Mental Health Center, we are strong believers in the therapeutic powers of art. Research shows that creative engagement can decrease anxiety, stress and mood disturbances. In a review of literature on the connection between art, healing and public health in the *American Journal of Public Health*, the authors conclude, "Through cre-

ativity and imagination, we find our identity and our reservoir of healing."

Works of art grace many areas of our campus, from our decorative steel driveway gates to the mosaic tiles in our reception area to the works of our clients displayed in hallways and offices.

We encourage our clients to express themselves through art, whether via visual arts, music, the written word or other media. We offer a variety of classes to help clients find their

Classes and Camaraderie at the Clubhouse

Clients at Hillview Mental Health Center find a place to socialize, explore and learn at the clubhouse. Every weekday from nine in the morning until two in the afternoon, the clubhouse bustles with activity.

The clubhouse is part lounge, part classroom, with a television, DVDs and books at the ready. Everyone who comes there knows they will find a welcom-

ing environment where they can just hang out, or can take advantage of various classes and groups. A low-cost lunch is offered each day, and monthly outings give participants a chance to explore in an encouraging setting.

"We really try to get people inspired to try things and join in," says Randy Hatada, program coordinator. "Some people are shy. Some are antisocial.

Coming to the clubhouse allows them to be around other people, even if they don't want to say anything. It's a step-by-step process."

Weekly classes include Arts and Crafts and Self-Expressions, which promote performance as a means of self-expression. Movies are screened Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons. There are weekly book, music and poetry groups, as well

as women's and men's groups. Those who are seeking help with anger and stress management, depression or healthy living can also find a group here.

Each month, participants have an opportunity to go on a supervised excursion. Destinations have included the beach, museums and baseball games.

"Case managers accompany the groups

and help clients understand the social aspects of each destination," notes Dr. Greg Schwartz, program director of the Field Capable Clinical Services Program at Hillview. "There may be specific skills and ways to behave at a particular venue, so each outing becomes a learning experience."



artistic voice, including music, poetry, arts and crafts and performance. Many clients who might not have explored art on their own, or who don't have the funds for supplies, have been able to engage in artistic expression because Hillview offers them the tools to do so.

And each year, in honor of Mental Health Awareness Month, Hillview Mental Health Center holds an Art Show to showcase the creations of our clients.

"Our case managers know their clients well, and encourage them to participate in the show," says Dr. Greg Schwartz, program director for Field Capable Clinical Services. "It's an opportunity for self-expression and to show another side of mental health."

This year's Art Show opened with the Self-Expressions group performing a skit about radio station HMHC (as in Hillview Mental Health Center), including a rousing rendition of the 1976 hit "Car Wash."

In the audience, director of community and public relations Sande Weiss marveled as the skit ended. "Some of these clients hardly ever speak," she said. "For them to get in front of their peers and do this is amazing."

One client played his own guitar composition and also discussed two pencil drawings he had created. Another client, who had just arrived at Hillview, performed a "praise dance" to Whitney Houston's "I Look to You".

Following the opening ceremony, all in attendance were invited to view the artworks and enjoy refreshments. On display were paintings, drawings, sculptures, jewelry and fabric art.

"This year, we showcased art created by staff members as well," said program coordinator Randy Hatada. "We wanted to give the message that art is for everyone."

