Giving Hope to Those on Society’s Fringes

Message from Eva S. McCraven
President and Chief Executive Officer

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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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, there is 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 both, which results 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.

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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 Transition-AL 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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for behavior which is a result of trauma 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.”

Currently, Hillview has five AB 109 consumers living on campus. Two are living in the residential building, and there 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 completed his treatment and is in job training for a trucker’s license. A second has completed his treatment and is in job training for a trucker’s license. A second has completed his treatment and is in job training for a trucker’s license. A second has completed his treatment and is in job training for a trucker’s license. A second has completed his treatment and is in job training for a trucker’s license. A second has completed his treatment and is in job training for a trucker’s license. A second has completed his treatment and is in job training for a trucker’s license. A second has completed his treatment and is in job training for a trucker’s license.

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 linkages to other services such as vocational training. For the first time in years, they can regain hope for the future.

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 creativity 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 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 was formed 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. Our display included paintings, drawings, sculptures, jewelry and fabric art.

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

In the audience, director of community and public relations Sandi Weis 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.”

There may be specific skills and ways to behave at a particular venue, so each outing becomes a learning experience.

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 welcoming 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 Randi Hata, program coordinator. “Some are shy. Some are antisocial.”

Many clients have completed their treatment and are here for a reason, that they have a purpose and that their job is to find it and go after it.”

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