



Newsletter

Spring 2010



ALAMEDA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AWARDS BONITA HOUSE *CHOICES* HOUSING CONTRACT

In February, Bonita House was awarded the contract to implement housing services in Alameda County's new *CHOICES for Community Living* program.

Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services (ACBHCS) is implementing CHOICES to **promote wellness and recovery** among long-term participants in ACBHCS case management service teams. A county-wide program, CHOICES will utilize evidence based practices in peer mentoring, housing, employment and care management to support 125 adults living with a serious mental health disorder each year.

Funded by Prop 63, the Mental Health Service Act, CHOICES supports a significant shift in the way treatment is offered in our system. It is hard for many mental health consumers to progress from treatment and "institutionalized" living to recovery and independence without the opportunity to design their own "exit strategy." CHOICES will provide this opportunity, with participants receiving expert support in reviewing their options and achieving their dreams.

CHOICES will be a collaborative effort between ACBHCS service teams, the ACBHCS Vocational Program, the County's Housing Services Office, Recovery Innovations of California- and Bonita House.

While ACBHCS service teams will provide case management and peer recovery coaching to participants, the Vocational Program will help them with school enrollment or paid competitive employment. Bonita House will lead the housing component of the effort.

In recent years, the mental health community has recognized the need for stable, affordable housing as a cornerstone of recovery. Unless housing is provided *first*, basic needs are left unmet. This makes long-term recovery from mental illness challenging.

Bonita House will work with the Housing Services Office to provide both long-term and shorter term housing rental subsidies to CHOICES participants. Our Housing Specialists will work closely with participants to determine their housing needs. Then we will cultivate relationships with landlords and property managers to ensure that participants are placed in affordable, stable housing.

Staff will provide support, education and counseling to participants to ensure that they successfully maintain their new independent housing. Staff will also collect information on affordable housing units throughout the county and post them to a community website where many other mental health consumers can benefit from them.

This is an exciting time in mental health treatment, with county systems implementing transformational programs focused on recovery from mental illness.

When CHOICES is implemented this summer, hundreds of people will be assisted in achieving self-defined mental health recovery goals in a supportive community.

With ACBHCS and other CHOICES partners, Bonita House hopes to facilitate hundreds of "stories of recovery" which will become a foundation for the transformation to a recovery-focused services system.



Message from the Board

Health Insurance Reform & Mental Illness

In March, the Bonita House Board of Directors hailed the passage of the nation's first comprehensive health insurance reform bill, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

This legislation has special importance for the millions of Americans with mental disabilities. In many ways, for many years, mental wellness has been overlooked in the definition of "health." Many of our clients relate stories in which friends or family members expected them to "snap out of" a mental illness – sending the message that illnesses of the mind were less real than illnesses of the body.

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The enactment last year of the U.S. Mental Health Parity and Addiction Treatment Act was a critical first step in establishing that mental health and substance use conditions *deserve the same level of attention and coverage* as physical conditions. Since last October, all employer-sponsored health plans must provide coverage for addiction and mental illness on a level consistent with other health problems.

The new health care bill takes these protections even further.

Parity must now be extended to health insurance plans offered to small businesses and individuals. Access to care will be improved with new insurance purchasing pools which will enable uninsured individuals to obtain coverage. The new law also prohibits pre-existing condition exclusions as well as rescission of coverage when people most need it.

The bill also establishes that coverage for dependent children can continue up to age 26. Since many mental illnesses strike during the young adult years, this provision helps ensure that many young people will receive treatment right at the onset of a major mental illness, reducing complications and speeding recovery.

Although the health insurance reform bill is imperfect and controversial – both among those who feel it goes too far and those who feel it doesn't go far enough – it represents a big leap forward in coverage and protections for Americans with mental illnesses. That alone is a reason

for optimism for clients of Bonita House programs.

Susan Weiner
President, Board of Directors

Residential Treatment Program Accepts Private Insurance

The Bonita House Dual Diagnosis Residential Treatment Program can now serve adults with **Blue Shield Insurance, PacifiCare, U.S. Behavioral Health Plan of California** - or those who have behavioral healthcare insurance managed by **United Behavioral Health, Value Options, or Managed Health Network**.

CLC Impacted

By Berkeley Adult School Budget Cuts

For 30 years now, Bonita House's Creative Living Center has benefited from the experience and dedication of teachers from the Berkeley Adult School's off-site program.

This important program allows frail seniors and adults with disabilities to take Berkeley Adult School classes, with teachers who come to supportive and safe learning environments. At the CLC, Adult School teachers lead our popular art program, which has helped hundreds of people to recover from serious mental illnesses. Teachers also lead creative writing, reading and other popular classes. The teachers are a big part of the well-being of the CLC community.



CLC Staff in front of members' art collage

But now, because of the state budget crisis, the Berkeley Unified School District must make draconian cuts, and the Adult School off-site program is especially vulnerable. **Education for older adults and for adults with disabilities may be eliminated entirely.**

At the same time, the Berkeley Unified School District receives over \$1.3 million from the state for off-site program attendance. This comes to the District as a block grant which they have permission to use for other purposes. The District says they will save \$405,000 by eliminating the off-site program, but over \$900,000 of the money the program brings is already being used to support *other* services.

Bonita House staff, board and clients are advocating for the Berkeley Adult School off-site program to keep a fraction of what it earns to

ensure its survival. As one CLC participant, Vita O'Shea, movingly wrote in a letter to the School District Board:

Throughout my life, I've struggled with mental health issues which have prevented me from reaching my educational and vocational goals... Since last fall, I've been taking the Berkeley Adult School's Art Exploration class at the CLC. In that time, I've been able to attend classes far more consistently, my creativity has begun to thrive and my ability to focus on and complete projects has greatly improved.

I've felt more supported, encouraged and accepted in that environment than I have in any other class or in most other areas of my life. This is due to the sense of camaraderie among my peers... and it is especially due to the truly extraordinary expertise,

compassion and inspiration the teacher, Arlene Rodini, brings to us.

The class is returning to me some of my confidence which was lost. I'm beginning to again have hope that I might someday be able to earn a degree and pursue work which would allow me to contribute to the world in the way I've wished to for so long."

The Berkeley School Board is now in the middle of the budgeting and cost-cutting process, and Bonita House is enlisting community help to ensure that the Berkeley Adult School off-site program stays intact.

You can help by sending comments and letters to the Berkeley School Board c/o Berkeley Unified School District at 2134 Martin Luther King Jr. Way, Berkeley, CA 94704, or by sending email to boardofed@berkeley.k12.ca.us. You can also call your Berkeley City Council member.

Consumer Representative Committee

Working to Advocate for Peers

We first reported on Bonita House's consumer empowerment movement back in 2000 when participants in our programs formed the agency's first *Consumer Representative Committee (CRC)*. This group sought a voice in programmatic decisions and to facilitate a recovery-oriented and peer-supported community.

Over the past 10 years, it has been universally recognized that the process of consumer involvement and peer leadership in programming helps people recover from mental illness.

The Center for Mental Health Services National Advisory Council

(mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/AdvisoryCouncil/attachment1.asp) reports that studies of consumer involvement in mental health programming show 'increased independence and self-reliance; improved self-esteem; enhanced coping skills and feelings of personal empowerment; and increased knowledge of services/rights, housing, employment, and other issues of concern to consumers.' The National

Advisory Council report continues: 'On a systems level, the U.S. Surgeon General notes that consumer self-help 'has substantially influenced mental health policy to tailor services to meet consumer needs.'

The shift towards peer-based recovery support was a focus of Prop 63, the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), a California-voter initiative approved in 2004. The MHSA helped create new, active – and often paid – roles for consumers in mental health programs. Since then, the consumer-led recovery movement has been going forward at full steam.

With a decade of active consumer participation and inclusion under its belt, Bonita House is supporting the CRC as it revitalizes its efforts through new member involvement and re-envisioning its mission.

The committee has received excellent technical assistance from the Alameda County MHSA-funded Wellness Recovery Resiliency Hub to assist with project development and meeting facilitation skills.

The Hub is also helping the CRC statement with an enhanced focus on program quality improvement, active peer advocacy, and creating various fun, social activities.



*CRC Meeting Attendees, Clockwise Left to Right:
Lisa Z., Andrée R., Deaundre R., Solomon S., John A.,
Steve B., John L., Jaleah W, Megan C.*

CRC's Coordinator, Deaundre Rice, says that the title, "Consumer Representative Committee," is a very exciting concept. The CRC wants to focus on how consumers can move from being dependent to independent, or inter-dependent with providers. "We want to inspire consumers to be very active within the meetings, with some support from staff, and to learn how to provide services to one another."

This may include advocating for each other, and helping people find ways to say housed.

And there's also the very important goal of having more social activities and inexpensive ways to have fun and enjoy life. That's an important part of recovery, and the CRC can work with the Bonita House community to help make that happen.

The committee is now recruiting additional members and planning new activities to meet their goals.

We will report on the results of this exciting effort in future newsletters.

Bonita House's Flagship Program: The Residential Treatment Program

Our first program, the Dual Diagnosis Residential Treatment Program opened in 1971 in a beautiful Queen Anne Victorian located in a lovely North Berkeley neighborhood. Originally, this program was designed to be a residential treatment alternative to hospitalization for people diagnosed with serious mental health disorders.

In 1991, in response to the increased number of people living with mental illnesses who had also developed substance use disorders, we transformed our programs to provide specialized services to meet their complex needs.

Serious psychiatric symptoms, in combination with drug or alcohol abuse often made it difficult for people to get the care they needed in either traditional mental health or substance abuse treatment programs.



People would go back and forth between the two systems unsuccessfully for years, without getting effective help.

The Residential Treatment Program is unique in that it is specifically designed to treat both disorders concurrently, with staff cross-trained in both mental health and substance abuse intervention and recovery.

We know that when research-based practices are provided, in a respectful partnership with clients and their families, recovery from both disorders is possible and attainable.

Though placement at our program is in high demand, we do have the capacity to accept private referrals and many insurance companies will cover our services.

Please feel free to contact ***Jana Klass, Residential Program Intake Coordinator at 510-526-4765, ext. 14*** for you or your loved one to see if we have availability. Together, we can work towards re-establishing a life with a future, with hope, and with dreams that are achievable.

Let My Voice Be Heard

As reported on Page 4, consumer involvement in mental health programs provides invaluable insights on how to improve programs and provide the most appropriate services, while increasing the personal power of the consumer participant.

Bonita House clients give us valuable feedback while serving as Client Representatives during our monthly Board meetings.

Following are some excerpts from our Residential Treatment Program Client Representative reports:

'Being at the Residential program has changed my life. I have been here for 3.5 months and hope to stay for 6. We are a close-knit group, like a family, and everyone works hard to encourage and look out for each other.' Tina, May 2009.

'I have been in other programs, but never one that addressed my mental health disorder. Since coming to the Residential program, I've learned that substance abuse and mental health issues go hand in hand. With new coping skills, I believe I can have a future that includes my goal of staying sober.' Derrick, July 2009.

'Every week it seems that past graduates stop by the house; it is exciting to hear about their continued recovery. My ideas and thoughts are respected here, as well as those of past graduates.' Mary, September 2009.

'Although I just came to the program, I feel incredibly welcome here. I am enjoying the program very much.' Barbara, February 2010.

Thank You to Our Generous Donors!



Once again, Bonita House thanks the many generous community members who supported our Annual Fund Raising Drive:

Joan Alexander, Walter & Mildred Alvarez, Marisa Angeles, Janie Anker, Dianne & Larry Appleton, Phyllis Kaplan & Michael Ballingall, Bonnie Benard, Gordon Benner, Eva & Ken Berg, Barbara Bernstein, James & Margaret Blades, Forrest & Barbara Bottomley, Louise & Jim Branscom, Sara & Philip Brooks, Floyd Brown, Duncan & Pat Buchanan, Charles & Mary Bucher, Johanne Calhoun, Nancy Calhoun, Laurie Capitelli/City of Berkeley, Keith Carson/Alameda County Board of Supervisors District 5, Elizabeth Carty, Betty Christian, City of Berkeley Civic Arts Commission, Jay Claiborne, Louise Colombatto, Lloyd & Nancy Coyne, Ralph Crispino, Mary & Rick Crispino, Maria Curtis, Betty Dahlquist, Patricia Day, Marilyn & Jim Day, Annie May de Bresson, Patricia de Jong/First Congregational Church of Berkeley,

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Fredrika May, Stuart & Barbara McCullough, David McCully, Mary Lu McGuire, Frank Miceli, Frank & Pat Mighetto, Jim Miller, Hannah Mott, Gloria E. Nelson, Newman Hall Holy Spirit Parish, Allie Norton, Tony & Jo Paap, Heather Pegas, Deanna Pereyra, Evelyn Phillips/First Church of Christ Scientist, Pat Pope, Margaret Power, Catherine Powers, Jack & Nina Radisch, Elizabeth Ratcliffe, John Rengel, Del & Betty Reynolds, Toby Ritter/The Ritter Foundation, Roz Roseman, Judy Rosenberg, Nancy Salamy/Crisis Support Services of Alameda County, A.H. & Elizabeth Schaaf, Peter Seidman, Mary Ellen Shay & Co., Vicki Smith, Matthew Smith & Lyla Bradley, Lorraine & Michael Sommers, Keith & Virginia Spiker, Kenny & Penny Spiker, James & Lory Stevenson, Joan Sullivan, Gail & John Swartzberg, Gary Terwelp, Virginia Tibbals, Jane Tishkoff, the James Irvine Foundation, Burks Toma, Marie Tourlos, Dyann Tresenfeld, TRUIST, Debbie Upland & Virginia Fontana/Business Professional Insurance Associates, Dorothy Walker, Lonnie Walker, Cecile & Harold Weaver, Susan Weiner, Maureen Wesolowski, Cristin Williams, Berton & Patricia Wilson, Senait Yehualashet, Colleen Zeisz, Elaine Zelnik, and several donors who wish to remain anonymous.

Come & Join Us for Bonita House, Inc.'s Creative Expressions Night 2010

The Creative Expressions Night is a night of visual and performing arts where staff, members and family can come together to share a talent, skill or interest with our community, or just appreciate the wildly diverse creativity and talents of others.

It can be almost ANYTHING!

Visual arts, writing, a song, a dance, an improvisations, playing an instrument, rapping, stand-up comedy, sharing a poem or piece of writing that you have composed or that you love, telling a story, juggling, acrobatics...**the creative possibilities are truly endless!**

When: Thursday, April 29, 2010
7:00 p.m.—9:00 p.m.

Where: Berkeley Fellowship of Unitarian Universalists Hall
1606 Bonita Avenue, Berkeley, CA
(Corner of Bonita and Cedar)

How: Are you interested in sharing your talent, or helping set up and run the show 'behind the scenes'? If so, please contact Eleanor Tannis at 510-809-1780, ext. 307 or by email to Eleanor@bonitahouse.org.





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For More Information about Bonita House

Check out our new website at www.bonitahouse.org. We've updated it to include full descriptions of Bonita House's continuum of care, a gallery of art created by CLC members, and a resource page for people (and their families) living with dual diagnosis.

