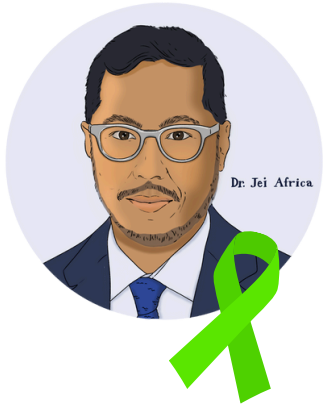




DIRECTOR'S NEWSLETTER: Mental Health Month



May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Since 1949, May has been recognized as Mental Health Awareness Month in the United States. During this time, individuals and organizations host awareness observances and campaigns to educate about mental health, wellness and reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness. During this month you will see many of us in BHRS wearing something lime green to show our unwavering commitment and support to those who are affected by mental health conditions. Come show your support by participating in any of the planned events this month! I guarantee that your life will be changed for the better.

Powered by Peers

Heart and Soul is a fully peer run organization supporting consumers in San Mateo County of all ages and backgrounds. We are happy to support Mental Health Awareness Month and are planning to provide Mental Health First Aid training for youth and adults in May. Additionally, we will host several [Seeing Through Stigma](#) panels throughout the community where consumers are able to share their stories in an effort to reduce stigma. Heart and Soul also supports the mental health community by providing [Wellness Recovery and Action Plan \(WRAP\)](#) services, an evidence-based process that supports consumers to identify the tools that keep them well and create action plans to put them into practice in everyday life. Participants are welcome to take part in [Total Wellness activities](#) such as Mindful Movement and support groups, share in a meal and engage in topics such as diabetes education, nutrition and smoking cessation.

At Heart and Soul, all staff, from the peer support specialists providing direct services to the directors and executive team, have lived experience. We understand what mental health means and this helps us better serve our peer participants. This Mental Health Month, we hope to raise awareness and reduce stigma as we work together to provide a warm and welcoming environment for San Mateo County. To learn about services offered this month and beyond, visit heartandsoulinc.org or email info@heartandsoulinc.org.



Heart and Soul staff at the 2023 Halloween open house

By Amaal Greenwood-Goodwin. Amaal is the Wellness Director at Heart & Soul. For questions, email him at amaalgg@heartandsoulinc.org.



Get Involved This May Mental Health Month!

Mental Health Month Planning Committee Events

Each year, BHRS' Office of Diversity and Equity partners with local agencies, clients/consumers and family members, and community members to form the Mental Health Month Planning Committee. The committee advises on priorities and collaborates to host events. This year, the Planning Committee selected a theme to address the loneliness health emergency in San Mateo County: Heal Through Connection #SMCAgainstLoneliness.



The 2023 MHM Planning Committee

Check out the calendar for ways to get involved this year:

MAY MENTAL HEALTH MONTH '24

CALENDAR OF EVENTS & 23-DAY "HEAL THROUGH CONNECTION" CHALLENGE

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Legend
26	27	28	1 Pathways	2 <i>1: Share a laugh with someone</i>	3 Lift Your Voices: An Open Mic Event	4 Hearts, Minds and Hands	BOLD = Event <i>Italics = 23-Day "Heal Through Connection" Challenge!</i> <i>For more info about events visit SMCHealth.org/attend-events</i>
5 <i>2: Check-in w/ an older family member</i>	6 <i>3: Wave or smile at someone new</i>	7 <i>4: Learn the name of one of your neighbors</i>	8 <i>5: Think of positive traits of close friend</i>	9 <i>6: Tell someone you're grateful for them</i>	10 <i>7: Join a hobby club e.g. book club, sports, etc</i>	11 Healing Connections: Open Mic Event	
12 <i>8: Move with a friend e.g. walk, dance</i>	13 <i>9: Let someone know if you're having a hard time</i>	14 Mindfulness Meditation	15 Tap Into Wellness ----- Supporting & Caring for Trans Youth	16 <i>10: Share a song with someone</i>	17 <i>11: Schedule hangout with a friend</i>	18 <i>12: Pass on act of kindness to someone new</i>	
19 <i>13: Treat someone to a beverage or snack</i>	20 May Mindfulness Day	21 <i>14: Give someone a hug</i>	22 <i>15: Volunteer for a local organization</i>	23 Finals Wellness Fair	24 <i>16: Thank someone for a time they helped you</i>	25 <i>17: Give a small gift to someone e.g. food, craft</i>	
26 <i>18: Spend quality time with a friend</i>	27 <i>19: Reconnect with an old friend</i>	28 <i>20: Offer to help someone with a task</i>	29 <i>21: Share a fond memory with someone</i>	30 <i>22: Compliment someone</i>	31 <i>23: Tell someone how much they mean to you</i>	1	



California's Mental Health Movement

TakeAction4MH is California's ongoing mental health awareness campaign, organized by CalMHSA. Visit [their website](#) for mental health podcasts, apps, resources and guides to checking in with yourself and others, video stories, toolkits and much more.

Wellness Walk With Jei

Join BHRS Director Dr. Jei Africa on an upcoming Wellness Walk in Central County! Enjoy the spring weather and get some light exercise at 2000 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo on 5/15 at 2 pm. We will meet in front of the 2000 Building and walk for about 30-minutes. Water and snacks will be provided. Hope to see you there!

Seats Open on the Behavioral Health Commission

San Mateo County's Behavioral Health Commission (BHC), formerly known as the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Commission, is committed to the involvement of diverse communities, key stakeholder organizations and individuals and family members with lived experience – especially those who rely on the public mental health system and alcohol and other drug services – in the design and evaluation of Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS). The BHC supports BHRS efforts to balance program accountability and compliance with Federal, State, and local laws and regulations with a continuing focus on quality and innovation. Additionally, the BHC supports our behavioral health system's core values of recovery, resilience, wellness and cultural competence through all of its activities.

The Commission currently consists of 12 members appointed by the Board of Supervisors representing family members, consumers/clients, professionals and interested residents. They review and evaluate the County's behavioral health needs, agreements, services, facilities and special programs and advise the Board of Supervisors and the BHRS Director. They review and approve procedures that ensure citizen and professional involvement at all stages of the planning process and submit an annual report to the Board of Supervisors on the needs and performance of the County's behavioral health system.

On January 27th, the Behavioral Health Commission met for their annual retreat to define their 2024 priorities. Their three goals for 2024 are:

- Learn about drug and alcohol misuse treatment
- Conduct site visits and inspections
- Continue supporting wellness literacy public training of mental health



There are currently seats open on the Behavioral Health Commission. We are looking for individuals with lived experience to become members and give the client voice and experience to the commission. If you are interested, please complete the [client/family member application](#) and submit to Chantae Rochester at crochester@smcgov.org.

The BHC meets the first Wednesday of every month and meetings are open to the public. Visit SMCHealth.org/Behavioral-Health-Commission to learn more.

Meet Behavioral Health Commissioners

Chris Rasmussen is a dedicated advocate and community leader, currently serving as the Chair of the San Mateo County Behavioral Health Commission. With over three decades of experience as a retired police officer, Chris brings a wealth of expertise to his role. Throughout his extensive career, he has tackled diverse challenges, from Public Relations to Homeless Outreach and Mental Health issues within the community.



In addition to his distinguished service in law enforcement, Chris is the Policy & Procedure Administrator for Public Safety at Stanford University, ensuring safety and security within the academic environment. His commitment to community welfare extends beyond his professional roles; he currently presides as the President of NAMI San Mateo County Board of Directors and has held leadership positions in various esteemed organizations, including the San Mateo County Sheriff's Activities League Board of Directors.

Chris's advocacy for mental health and homelessness reform is unwavering. He champions restructuring crisis response systems and advocates for non-armed crisis intervention teams, emphasizing the need for compassionate and effective approaches to mental health crises. With over two decades of involvement in non-profit work, Chris demonstrates his dedication to uplifting and empowering marginalized communities. His vision for a more inclusive and supportive society drives his efforts to expand mobile mental health services for the unsheltered, ensuring that every individual receives the care and assistance they deserve.

Ryan Lopez is a 3rd-year Politics Major at the University of San Francisco and is a Coastside local, born and raised in Half Moon Bay. As such, it is his endeavor to act as a liaison between the BHC and the various underrepresented Coastside communities.



Being a recent high school graduate, he noticed a lack of mental health services among his peers and once the pandemic hit, it seemed that the urgency for these services grew tenfold. Ryan felt that joining the BHC would put him in a position where he can give help to those that need it and educate youth who may not be aware of these services.

Ryan is also associated with Ayudando Latinos A Soñar (ALAS) as a founding member and Youth Ambassador. More recently, he began to work with a media company, Silicon Valley Latino (SVL), as a Contributing Writer and Collegiate Cultura Ambassador.

In terms of goals for this year, he would like to bring greater awareness from the BHC to the various Coastside towns by linking the BHC to the groups he is associated with. Ryan shares, "Ultimately, I would like a stronger connection between the County and the Coastside".

BHRS Office Built On Lived Experience

The Office of Consumer and Family Affairs (OCFA) at BHRS has been championing the work for people with lived experience for 20 years! We are a vibrant, diverse, and multicultural team of individuals, including five team members fluent in Spanish and one fluent in Tagalog, who have personal experience as consumers of behavioral health services or as family members of individuals who have received behavioral health services. We strive to educate our staff about the value individuals with lived experience bring to our clients.

Data in San Mateo County has shown that when a Peer or Family Partner is involved in a client's treatment, clients and families feel less isolated, experience reduced crisis hospitalizations and justice system involvement, improve their follow-up with alcohol & other drug and/or mental health treatment and gain better access to community resources such as housing, shelter and Medi-Cal. We believe that people can achieve recovery when provided with the necessary resources and opportunities, and one of those vital resources is peer support and family peer support.

We provide opportunities for clients and family members to feel empowered, and have clients/family members who have participated in important decision-making committees such as the Behavioral Health Commission, MHSA Steering Committee, Quality Improvement Committee and more.

Some of our key responsibilities include:

- Overseeing grievances for BHRS and contracted agencies. We are committed to ensuring that every community member feels heard, valued, and supported to live a fulfilling, healthy life free from discrimination and stigma.
- Supporting the workforce development for BHRS Peer Support Specialists/Peer Support Workers and Family Peer Support Specialists/Family Partners. We are proud to have 14 Peer Support Specialists, eight Family Peer Support Specialists and two Family Partners in the certification process.
- Striving to develop and promote self-advocacy for clients and families through educational opportunities like the Lived Experience Academy (LEA), Lived Experience Educational Work Group (LEEW), and the Advocacy Academy.

We don't do it alone! We collaborate throughout BHRS and with community partners such as the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office CARON community program, San Mateo County Office of Education, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and more.

In April,
OCFA
welcomed
new manager,
Dr. Jana
Spalding!



By Yolanda Ramirez. Yolanda is a Senior Community Program Specialist with OCFA. If you would like to know more about OCFA, please email ocfa@smcgov.org, stop by our office at 1950 Alameda de las Pulgas, Suite 157, or visit our website at smchealth.org/support-clients-family.

Celebrate Earth Month at the Phoenix Garden!

We invite you to join us at the Phoenix Garden, nestled across the street from the San Mateo County (SMC) Youth Services Center (YSC) in San Mateo, for our April Earth Month Phoenix Garden Workday on **Saturday April 27, 2024, from 9:00 am – 1:00 pm.**

The story of the Phoenix Garden is one of transformation and renewal. When the new YSC opened its doors in 2006, there was a vision to revitalize the land where the old probation buildings and Hillcrest Juvenile Hall once stood. Supported by BHRS and the Health System, this vision has continued to blossom into a thriving community space. The name “Phoenix Garden” reflects the rebirth of both the land and the individuals it serves. Today, the Phoenix Garden stands as a collaborative effort with BHRS, University of California’s Cooperative Extension and Public Health, Policy and Planning, a division of SMC Health, working together to create a healing environment for youth, clients and community members.

As you step into the Phoenix Garden, you’ll discover a sanctuary of nature’s beauty. From the serene Lavender Labyrinth at the heart of the garden to the orchard of fruit trees and native oak trees, there’s something for everyone to enjoy and contribute to. One particularly poignant feature of the Phoenix Garden is the Memorial of Love, created by the BHRS workforce to honor the lives of those lost early in the pandemic and to support healing within the community.

We invite you to show some love for the land during Earth Month at the Phoenix Garden! Whether you’re a seasoned gardener or new to the world of horticulture, there’s a place for you in our vibrant community. Let’s come together this workday for seeding and planting at our orchard and make our garden more beautiful!



For BHRS staff, up to 4 hours of volunteer service can count towards the County’s annual 20-hour training requirement. Please register for the Phoenix Garden Workday here. For any questions or inquiries, please reach out to Julio Contreras at jcontre@ucanr.edu or Regina Moreno at rmoreno@smcgov.org

By Regina Moreno. Regina is a Clinical Services Manager II in the Youth Services Division at BHRS and has played a pivotal role in nurturing the Phoenix Garden Program since its inception. Her leadership has been instrumental in shaping the vision, planning and execution of the garden's healing initiative. Over time, she has remained dedicated to enhancing the program's impact by spearheading the development of educational programs, broadening outreach efforts and fostering meaningful connections within the community. Regina recognizes the profound health benefits associated with being in nature and is committed to furthering horticultural therapy opportunities in San Mateo County.