



DIRECTOR'S NEWSLETTER: Contractor's Edition



BHRS' network of contract agencies make providing services to our community possible. We partner with over 100 community organizations throughout San Mateo County and beyond and rely on their knowledge of the community and expertise to offer services for our residents. Approximately 65% of our overall services are provided by these partner agencies. Like BHRS, often the work is being done by people with lived experience. In this edition, get to know a few of our partners better and join me in celebrating their success and invaluable services to our community over the years.

Voices of Recovery Reflects, Celebrates Growth

Since its establishment in 2010, Voices of Recovery has demonstrated the power of community and a shared vision. What began as just an idea has grown into a strong partnership with San Mateo County, creating a peer-run organization that truly understands and meets the needs of the people in and in need of long-term recovery from substance use and mental health challenges. The growth from humble beginnings in cubicles to the establishment of the Recovery Connection Center marks a significant milestone. The Center serves as a beacon of hope, providing a safe space for individuals seeking support, advocacy and services. Over the past year, Voices has made significant progress in its vision of growth by introducing new programs, such as Community Outreach and Social Media and Marketing Departments. During the first six months of the soft opening, the **Recovery Connection Center has seen a 24% increase in participants compared to the same period in 2022-2023.**

Moreover, Voices has provided staff members with additional career development training and opportunities for personal growth. Voices now has 10 certified Advanced Level Wellness Recovery Action Plan Facilitators (ALFs) and four Peer Specialists, making it the only organization in the county with such certifications. A disability lift has also been installed, making the facility wheelchair accessible. The dedicated and caring staff are essential to the center's success, ensuring that everyone who walks through its doors feels heard, understood and supported on their journey towards recovery and well-being.



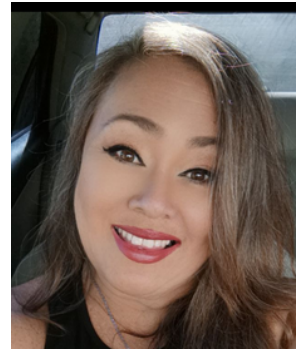
By Reena Sandhu, Recovery Coach II. Contact Voices of Recovery via email at: info@vorsmc.org or by phone at (650) 980-1922.





Employee Spotlight: Lived Experience Shapes MHA's Team

Renee Waash has been a valued employee at Mental Health Association's (MHA) Spring Street Shelter for eight years. Her Housing Class for Shelter residents is incredibly popular and people consistently ask her when the next class will be. Renee is smart, knowledgeable, creative and is relatable to the people we serve, as nine years ago she was a client in the Shelter. Her experience is the basis for the class - it's where she learned what was needed. As she says, "It could happen to anyone."



In 2014, she had a housing voucher but her rent increased beyond what the voucher would cover. Renee tirelessly applied for alternative housing but could not find a landlord willing to accept a voucher. She moved from housing to a nice hotel and then to a "not so nice" hotel and finally to her car. Her hope faded and depression increased. Eventually, she was referred to Spring Street Shelter which she refers to as her "yellow brick road, flying monkeys and all." During her time there, she was able to work on her challenges (flying monkeys) and both set and accomplish many personal and professional goals. She moved to stable housing and came back to volunteer with MHA Occupational Therapists at the Shelter. At this point, Homeless Services Manager Georgia Peterson recruited her as an employee and she has been growing and inspiring ever since. "Happiness used to be an absence of sadness for me. Now it's about looking inward and navigating the ups and downs and changing and evolving." We are all very proud of Renee; her growth over the years and her passion for and commitment to the work we do makes MHA and Spring Street Shelter that much better.

Mental Health Association Youth Empowerment Program Manager Terriana Briggs wasn't always the one providing housing services — there was a time when she needed help, too. Born to a single mom in deep East Oakland, she grew up experiencing housing insecurity. After high school, she began working full-time at a women's shelter and later became a mother. When the pandemic hit and childcare was no longer available, Terriana had to quit her job and eventually go to a shelter herself.



"I felt a lot of shame going from providing services to receiving them," Terriana recalls. When childcare opened up, she found work that provided enough income to get their first apartment which changed everything. Since then, she has completed a certificate program for Community Health Care Workers and is now studying Communications at the College of San Mateo. Her personal experience combined with her professional role creates a powerful example for the young people she serves. "I'm living proof that the right opportunity can transform someone's life."

By Melissa Platte, Executive Director of Mental Health Association of San Mateo County. MHA enriches quality of life, restores dignity and reduces homelessness, particularly for those affected by mental illness and HIV/AIDS.



Mobile Outreach Combats Loneliness for Young Adults

Edgewood Center's Transition Age Youth Full-Service Partnership (TAY FSP) program and the Drop-in Centers (DIC) are vital resources in San Mateo County designed specifically to support emerging adults ages 18-25 years old. The TAY FSP program provides intensive, community-based mental health services to 45 youth, addressing complex trauma at personal, familial and societal levels. Services include wraparound mental health treatment, or comprehensive treatment services across organizations, aimed at achieving independence and wellness. The Drop-in Centers, located in San Bruno and Redwood City, offer a safe, peer-led environment where young adults can access free resources, engage in activities and workshops and participate in community outings. The DIC's strengths-based and trauma-sensitive approach ensures effective, youth-driven programming.



In addition to these essential services, the Drop-in Centers' Mobile Outreach Van plays a crucial role in addressing the ongoing crises of loneliness, isolation and lack of equitable service access across all communities in San Mateo County. By bringing support directly to those in need, the Mobile Outreach Van ensures that individuals who may otherwise be marginalized or underserved have access to necessary resources such as hygiene products, food, clothing and transportation tickets. The van makes stops at local colleges and resource centers but is always working to expand its list of locations. This outreach initiative emphasizes the importance of connection and accessibility, offering a lifeline and providing a critical service in promoting overall community well-being.

By the numbers:

- Over 500 TAY participants have been supported by TAY FSP or DIC's resources this past year.
- More than 25 unique workshops were held this past year by our Drop-In Centers.
- Collaborated with 25 unique San Mateo County agencies.



By **Dan Ecklund, LMFT**, Behavioral Health Director, Transition Age Youth Full-Service Partnership. Learn more by scanning the QR code or [clicking here](#).



A Community Clinic Fueled by Partnerships Celebrates 10th Anniversary

Children's Health Council (CHC) recently celebrated the 10-year anniversary of its Ravenswood Program and the 1-year anniversary of its new office location in the heart of East Palo Alto in the Ravenswood Shopping Plaza. With over 20 nonprofits in attendance, the luncheon was a celebration of the collective power of partnerships in promoting youth mental health in East Palo Alto and eastern Menlo Park.

CHC Ravenswood's program began in 2014 with the support of several mission-oriented donors. The program started off with three dedicated staff members and no physical office space. Fast forward to 2024, the program is comprised of a team of seven staff (mostly bilingual/bicultural clinicians), a beautiful clinic space with three therapy offices and expanded programming, including an array of direct clinical services.



Services are delivered in English, Spanish, and Urdu/Hindi for youth and families ages 0-25 and extend beyond direct clinical services to include parent consultations, case management and community engagement workshops. Clients who seek services at CHC Ravenswood may access services by using their Health Plan of San Mateo (HPSM) insurance or at no-cost. This past year, the clinic launched its first Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) group, a type of psychotherapy to provide skills for managing intense emotions and negotiating social relationships, for children and parents provided at no cost and in Spanish. The clinic has also partnered with All Five Preschool to provide on-site behavioral support to infants, toddlers, young children, parents and school teachers.

CHC Ravenswood's mission-driven work is fueled by its partnerships and collaborations with local community-based organizations, schools and BHRS. BHRS clients who attend a CHC non-public school (Esther B. Clark Schools), for example, can receive psychiatry services. In 2018, the Ravenswood Wellness Partnership was created to increase capacity, improve coordination and enhance access to mental health services for youth and families in East Palo Alto and Belle Haven/eastern Menlo Park.



Through its years of trust-building with the local Ravenswood community, its strong partnerships and support from donors and the County, CHC Ravenswood is excited to continue its programming to ensure no child and family falls through the cracks.

By Zahra Murtaza, Ph.D., Licensed Psychologist & Ravenswood Program Manager. Contact us at [650-702-2487](tel:650-702-2487) or ravenswood@chconline.org to refer a family, partner with us, and/or visit us at our new location at [1765 East Bayshore Road, East Palo Alto, CA](https://www.chc.org/locations/east-palo-alto).

