



Mental Health Association

OF SAN MATEO COUNTY

In This Issue:

FRIENDSHIP CENTER 37TH ANNIVERSARY

MHA's Friendship Center Program is celebrating its 37th year of providing support, socialization and educational activities for individuals with mental illness. St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in San Mateo was home to the first Friendship Center, which opened its doors in February 1970. Individuals gathered at the church hall weekly to drink coffee, play cards, and socialize with peers and volunteers from the community. Anyone who attended was automatically considered a "member," with no questions asked. From that time on, no matter how infrequently they might attend one of the programs, they always remained a "member."



▲ Helen Stewart, Friendship Center volunteer of more than 30 years.

-continued on page 2



First Person:
Cassandra Odom (page 2)



Staff Profile: Amy Lee
(page 3)



MHA Programs (page 3)

32ND ANNUAL FRIENDSHIP CENTER HOLIDAY PARTY A SUCCESS



▲ The Lagoon Room at the Foster City Recreation Center is filled to capacity.

The MHA's Friendship Center Holiday Party was a smashing success. A picturesque view overlooking the water at Leo Ryan Park in Foster City and a sunny day made for a perfect holiday party. Guests were provided with a festive atmosphere that encouraged many to get up and dance or socialize with friends. Volunteers, staff, and MHA Board members were busy serving snacks, beverages, lunch and dessert to the 275 guests in attendance. As a special highlight to the day Santa and Mrs. Claus were in attendance and made certain that each guest received a wrapped present. MHA Board members, staff members and clients extend their thanks to the community for the personal and financial support received that made this very special event possible. ☺



We need
**furniture
donations**
for our new tenants.

Contact Bonnie Glass:
(650) 368-3345 x. 137
Donations@mhasmc.org.
Donations are tax-deductible.



-continued from page 1

The program proved so successful, that eight months later a second site was opened in San Bruno. This site, too, proved successful due to a dedicated group of community volunteers. In 1973 the Menlo Park Junior League opened a similar program, which they requested MHA take over. This became the third Friendship Center.

Over the years, the Friendship Center Program has expanded to include five locations in Daly City, San Mateo, San Carlos, East Palo Alto, and Belmont. In January 2007, the Friendship Center expanded again to provide services to residents at the newly constructed Belmont Apartments.

The program has grown to include group outings to parks, movie theaters, restaurants, and other places in the area. For many Friendship Center members, these outings are 'first-time' experiences that they would not be able to have on their

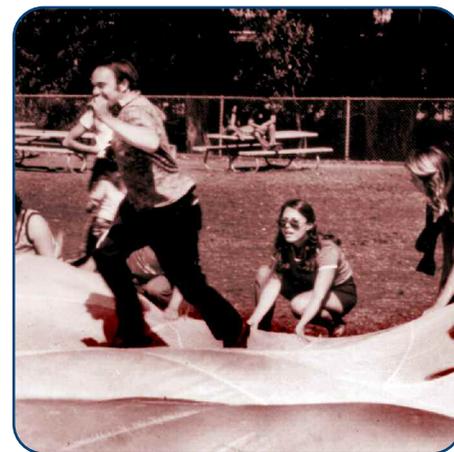
own. Annual field trips now include the Bay Cruise, Giants or Oakland A's baseball games, and Santa Cruz. Monthly outings include trips to the beach, museums, or sightseeing in San Francisco.

The Friendship Center is also a place where individuals come together to celebrate holidays, including Valentine's Day, Halloween and Christmas. These celebrations are often the only ones that Friendship Center members experience. Friendship Centers provide a safe, familiar, comfortable place for individuals with mental illness to come daily, weekly or as often as they like to have fun and feel part of a community.

MHA has been fortunate to have a dedicated group of volunteers and staff members who have made the success of the Friendship Centers possible during the past 37 years. We are fortunate to have Angela Bruno-Castro as Friendship Center Coordinator. If you've had the pleasure of meeting Angela, you know that her energy is enough to brighten the gloomiest of days! MHA also is

very pleased to have added two new staff members, Natalia Arellano and Martha Tercero. They, too, have sparkling smiles and uplifting attitudes.

If you would like to join this wonderful group of individuals making a difference, please call Angela Bruno Castro at (650) 368-3345 ext. 102 to become a volunteer. You'll be glad you did! ☺



▲ 1978 New Games Festival at Sequoia High School.

FIRST PERSON: CASSANDRA ODOM

"Sitting here talking about my life is like a dream," smiles Cassandra Odom who emits a grace and contentment she attributes to having come through difficult times.

Cassandra's life got off to a traditional start. After graduating from San Mateo High School in 1965, she married and moved to San Jose where her husband worked as a computer technician, while she enrolled in a local college. Within two years, their son arrived and she tabled her educational goals to be a full-time mother. Over the next four years her marriage endured hardship and eventually ended. Cassandra speculates the trouble was due to the relocation, lack of friends and support nearby, and the young age of both partners. Heartbroken, she picked up the pieces and set her sights on education again. Guided by the desire to help people, she

attended and successfully completed the courses to receive her AA in Human Services. She transferred to UC Santa Cruz to work on a degree in Sociology. She and her young son lived in student housing while she studied, working part-time and attending classes. "I was really overdoing it," Cassandra recalls. "It was around the end of a summer school course when I realized something was wrong."

A caring professor made a call to her mother, concerned Cassandra was experiencing a "nervous breakdown." Cassandra was hospitalized and received a diagnosis of schizophrenia. Shortly thereafter she began a four-year inpatient program. Her only comfort was the security of knowing her son was in good hands with her mother and stepfather. "I started to get back on my feet...because I had everything I needed all in one place."



For the next nine years, Cassandra saw her son every night, cooking for him at her mother's house. "I would mop the floors and clean for my mother, doing what I could." Soon after being discharged, Cassandra moved back to San Mateo, commuting every day to a job in San Francisco.

-continued on page 4

STAFF PROFILE: AMY LEE



Amy Lee is the Supportive Services Coordinator at MHA's Belmont Apartments. She provides case management services and support to the 24 formerly homeless residents.

Amy has her Bachelor's degree from Portland State University in Oregon.

Amy is known by her case management colleagues to be dedicated and concerned for the needs and well-being of the clients. Recently, she got up at 4 o'clock in the morning to transport a client to the airport so that he could return home for a family emergency. This is the kind of sacrifice that reflects a commitment to client needs that is typical of Amy Lee and all MHA staff.

What does your job entail at the Belmont Apartments?

In general, I work with tenants to first help them to identify their goals. Then, we work together to define steps necessary to reach them. I offer information and referrals, support, and ongoing reminders and encouragement.

Our program at Belmont Apartments offers a group or activity six days a week. It's been very rewarding to see tenants become more engaged in community life and connected to each other. It's always fun to celebrate our successes. Recently, one tenant celebrated 20 years of sobriety and another reached his one year anniversary in permanent housing after being chronically homeless for many years.

What is rewarding about your job?

I feel lucky to not only work with such a neat group of tenants, but also, to have such wonderful co-workers. The case managers at MHA are truly a talented group and a great resource whenever I'm looking for new ideas or a fresh perspective.

What is challenging about your job?

There are so many great things about my job, it is difficult to think of any part of it as challenging. But, there are some mixed blessings that come with working on-site at the Belmont Apartments. While it is great to be close and available to the tenants every day, it is a challenge to be at a location separate from the MHA main offices. Also, I often feel I could use a few more hours in the day to accomplish everything I would like to do. ☺

MHA PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

Friendship Centers offer community-based social and recreational opportunities for adults with mental illness.

The **Spring Street Shelter** provides temporary shelter by referral for homeless adults with mental illness.

Spring Street Transitional Housing provides a temporary supportive housing program to transition people out of homelessness into stable housing.

The **Housing and Client Assistance Program** provides financial assistance to help low-income, HIV positive San Mateo County residents to obtain and maintain housing.

Shelter Plus Care combines housing subsidies with support services to help adults with mental illness live successfully in the community.

The **CHRIS Program** provides Living Skills Assessments and training services for Spring Street Shelter, Spring Street Transitional Housing and community clients.

The **Community Friends Program** offers a companion/support network for isolated individuals so they can participate in community activities.

Support and Advocacy for Young Adults in Transition (SAYAT) helps stabilize homeless young adults and facilitate their move into stable housing.

The **St. Matthew Support Service Program** offers on-site support services to the 56 low-income residents of the St. Matthew Residential Hotel.

"14 Slots" Supportive Housing combines housing subsidies with intensive support services to stabilize chronically homeless dually diagnosed individuals in stable housing.

Belmont Apartments provides stable, affordable supportive housing for 24 homeless adults with mental illness.

Breaking the Silence is a community education program available to help students learn about mental illness.

Visit www.mhasmc.org for more information about our programs.



▲ Meg Janci & Jeff Thompson



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of San Mateo County**
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▲ *Santa, an Elf, Mrs. Claus and Angela Bruno-Castro at the 32nd Annual Friendship Center Holiday Party.*

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-continued from page 2

The job and commute were draining and her symptoms returned. After a brief hospitalization, Cassandra completed a partial hospitalization program and began a 20 year tenure at Vocational Services. She continued living in a shared housing setting until the landlord gave notice to all of the tenants to move, leaving Cassandra homeless.

Cassandra was referred to MHA's Spring Street Shelter, and then to the transitional housing program. She was one of the first residents to move into the MHA's

Villa Terrace site, a large shared house in a quiet residential neighborhood, when it opened in 1993. "As you can imagine, I was thrilled. I didn't know places like this existed." In some ways Cassandra's life has come full circle. Thanks to financial support from the City of San Mateo toward the operation of the Villa Terrace program, Cassandra is able to live in a house in a familiar neighborhood, only blocks from where she spent her childhood and young adult life.

Although Cassandra has continued to face challenges, including serious family illness, loss of a trusted psychiatrist, and

employment issues, Cassandra received the support that has allowed her to continue to succeed. Cassandra credits her case manager and others with providing much needed help. "They noticed and cared. I got good advice and the help I needed....I owe my life to mental health, really". For Cassandra, "...having a stable home at Villa Terrace, staying busy, taking medications, attending groups, and having the support of a case manager..." has made all the difference in the world. ☺