



**WELLNESS CENTERS AT LACDMH
WORKING TOGETHER TO REBUILD LIVES**

Wellness is trying to reestablish a life that's not connected to illness, but connected to all sorts of things...a way to normalize your life, just bringing back people's pieces of life and what they're interested in.—Sherwood Brown, Mental Health Services Coordinator, Edelman MHC

The writers of the Mental Health Services Act of 2004 visualized Wellness Centers as ongoing support programs for clients who had achieved a working level of recovery. From the beginning, LACDMH leaders saw clients as playing a major role in helping to develop and run the Centers. The concept of Wellness Centers grew out of initiatives like the Berkeley Drop-In Center, Project Return, Mental Health America's Village in Long Beach, BACUP, and the LA County Client Coalition, all established in the late 1990s and early 2000s. But the Centers have evolved beyond what many anticipated would be possible.

Today there are 21 Wellness Centers in LACDMH directly operated mental health centers. Each offers its own set of services and programs, which change and evolve with client interests, but there are many common factors: client involvement and involvement, developing client creativity, building social skills and community integration. For many clients, Wellness Centers provide and help to rebuild the family and community ties that had been lost or broken.



Positive Visions Client Council Meeting, led by client Nereida Vasquez, at Northeast Wellness Center

Clients are able to develop work, responsibility and leadership skills through the Wellness Centers. They have opportunities to lead groups, including Client Councils that plan activities and help to raise funds and Dual Diagnosis or COD support groups. As their social skills and confidence evolve, they can move into volunteer positions as office workers, ambassadors, and peer advocates; and then graduate, after Departmental training, into paid positions as community workers. In these jobs, client workers help to reassure those new to the mental health system, guide them in making the right choices, and share hope from their own lived experience.

Being an ambassador at the clinic is an amazing experience. I feel privileged, I feel honored and am grateful that I get to give back and pay it forward. To come here for the first time is scary, it's overwhelming, it's uncertain. You're not sure what's going on. It's confusing. I get to tell them that it's going to be OK, you're going to get some help, and I'll help you with the paperwork. I'm here as a reliable resource for people to help them. – Denise Hamilton, Ambassador, Long Beach

Many LACDMH clients have creative talents that have been neglected or unappreciated during their struggles with mental illness. Art, Poetry, Writing, and Theatre workshops help to develop and recognize these abilities.



Sherwood Brown, Mental Health Services Coordinator, explores the Edelman Art Show exhibits with a visitor.

At Edelman MHC, for example, a yearly Art Show highlights work in painting, sculpture, and jewelry design; while Brook Sylvann leads an Improv workshop which helps to teach trust and openness in a relaxed, fun way.

An Improv workshop at Edelman



Client artwork fills the walls at the Northeast Wellness Center, where Frank Duarte designed the “Achieving the Dream” Center logo. Teacher Joella March brings her “Art of Daybreak” classes to Long Beach and other centers.

It was my volunteer services in the arts and all of the support from the people that I did work for here at the Center and Northeast that just gave me a lot of inspiration, and I had never really come across people who were so supportive and thrilled and jazzed by the work I was able to produce that just started to make me feel, you know, a light at the end of the tunnel if you will. It brought me out of that dark spot where I was at that I couldn't get out. – Frank Duarte, Volunteer Northeast



“Our Goal is to Help Others Achieve their Dreams”: Northeast Wellness Center logo in Spanish, designed by client Frank Duarte

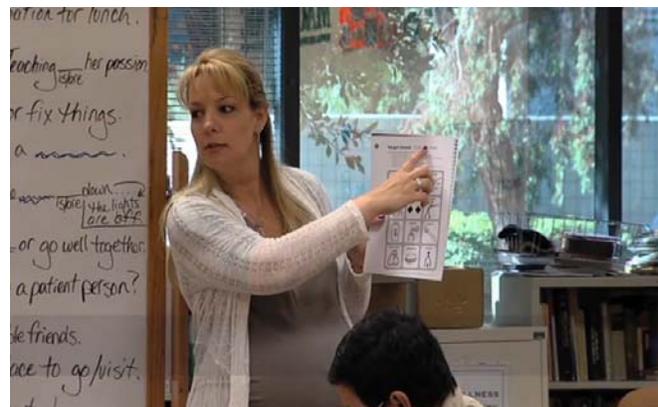
The Wellness Center is also a place to come and meet friends who can share experiences, challenges, and successes.



Recreational Therapist Herb Anderson leads Morning Exercise at San Fernando Mental Health Center

At San Fernando MHC, clients can join in morning exercise, help to cook meals, play pool, participate in GED and TOESL classes, or just chat.

LAUSD Teacher Susan Hynes leads a TOESL class at SFMHC.



There are also opportunities to explore the community, as with Edelman’s Fun Seekers group, which decides together on a different activity weekly, visiting local museums together, going

shopping, or to the beach. Clients at Northeast Wellness developed the “Angels on Call” group to visit friends who are unable to come into the Center, to maintain their social bond and offer support as needed.



Angels on Call Nedi Vasquez and Mary Gonzalez-Veleta pay a home visit

I would say that one of the sort of comforting things about coming here is the different leaders and the different staff members and peer advocates and different people around. You get to know them, and it becomes very homey. The atmosphere is very homey and we see each other week after week. I think that's something that is pretty important, and that makes this a very comfortable place to come. I would say, "Just relax [and] don't be scared. Ask any questions that you need to ask." -- Elizabeth, Client, Edelman

These diverse activities make the Wellness Centers lively and fun, but the underlying purpose is to help the recovering client discover in himself or herself the ability to achieve, to interact, to relax, to identify and realize personal goals, to be part of a community and to rebuild a life.

Wellness, from what I understand, is a concept of health. With Wellness, the clients try to gain responsibility for our lives and we try and get empowerment. The staff here tries to empower us with the feeling we have control over our lives. It's empowerment and taking responsibility for who you are and accepting the mental illness and going on beyond that. – Robert, Client, Edelman

It was very, very important for the clients not only to have a program, but to have a place that they can call their home. And this is what this has really become. The challenge was to find a facility that was accessible, to put together a place that hopefully what the clients have felt, that they find in this place that they can come, that they can participate in groups, they can express themselves. It became very important to have a mission and to have a vision and to have some guiding principles. So, in talking to the clients and getting together with the staff, it became very apparent that we all have dreams, we all have goals; and so we felt that it was very important to put that as the essence of the program. To assist others in reaching their dreams. To assist others in fulfilling those dreams. – Laura Span, Program Head, Northeast Wellness Center