

## Mental Health Services Available in Alameda County Through BACS

*Summarized by Thomas T. Thomas*

A local non-profit organization, Bay Area Community Services (BACS) offers a number of mental health-related programs in Alameda County. The speaker at our January 26 meeting, **Clayton Goad, MFT**, is the Director of Mental Health Services at BACS.

“I started out teaching special education,” she said, “and felt I did such a good job talking with the kids that I could be a school therapist. But after graduate school, my first internship was in a halfway house for adults with mental illness and I really connected with them. That led me, ten years ago, to BACS, where I started as director of a day program.”

Goad showed a banner with the organization’s new logo, replacing the old red-block logo with the BACS acronym. The new logo, which will be used officially beginning in March, shows a pathway with a cottage at the end and the slogan “Keeping adults connected to their communities since 1953.”

“This reflects the idea that we are a path or a journey that leads the participant to a successful conclusion,” she said. “The home at the end represents independence.”

BACS offers programs for older adults as well as persons with mental illness. For the latter, the primary services are case management and supported independent living. Although BACS is a private organization, 95% of its funding for mental health services comes from Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services, and participants in its services must be referred through the county’s ACCESS Program, which follows financial and treatment guidelines for eligibility.

“The case manager is the person the consumer is attached to in the mental health system,” Goad said. “He or she helps the person meet goals and assists with treatment plans, medications, doctor’s appointments, housing, and programs. The philosophy used to be to hold the consumer close and not let him or her make mistakes—which meant doing things that the case manager thought was best. Now, we’re moving toward being client driven, which means we encourage the person to explore and do what he or she wants.”

With supported independent living, BACS provides 49 beds at nine properties located in Castro Valley, Hayward, Livermore, Oakland, Pleasanton, and Union City. Clients who have reached a moderate level of independence may stay in the facility for two years, with the goal of moving on to independent living.



*CLAYTON GOAD, MFT*

“Our program director has good contacts with landlords in the area and excels at helping to set people up on their own,” Goad said.

People in supported independent living must be case managed, either through the county or by someone from a private organization, and must take their medications. Members have their own rooms, for which they pay a less-than-market rent, but may share a bathroom. They share chores and learn lifestyle skills like cooking and cleaning.

BACS also runs a series of creative living centers (CLCs), which provide an alternative to long-term institutional care for approximately 800 adults at locations in Alameda, Hayward, Fremont, Oakland, and Pleasanton. The centers offer a day program modeled on a clubhouse atmosphere that fosters a sense of home, belonging, and mutual support. Each center is run a little differently as to hours and programs. All have core groups to provide the center’s services like reception, phone answering, producing a newsletter, taking care of the house and grounds, and cooking the midday meal. “Finding a niche and being needed makes us feel better about ourselves,” Goad said. In addition, they have educational, interest, and support groups like reading, sewing, WRAP,<sup>1</sup> and art therapy. The CLCs usually have a ratio of 40 members to three staff, and the staff are encouraged to hang out with the members, eat lunch with them, and model good social skills through their interactions.

“We find that members are often people who have been disempowered by the system,” she said. “So we’re trying to empower them. One of my goals is to teach the members to be able to say ‘no.’ That way, we’re doing what they want, rather than adopting a formal therapist-to-client relationship.”

The CLCs are open to anyone, not just through referral from ACCESS. Psychiatrists and family members can refer their members to a center.

BACS also provides a crisis residential program with space for 12 individuals in Hayward. This is an alternative to hospitalization for people going through a crisis, such as changing medications, and offers a chance to get stable. The person stays for up to two weeks, which is different from a halfway house, where the stay may be six months to a year. The program provides a structured day, including group and individual meetings, skill-building activities, and workshops.

Finally, BACS has an employment program that works with the California Department of Rehabilitation. Two on-call job counselors help members with preparation, including hygiene, dress, and interviewing skills, job development and placement, and follow-up on-the-job support.

**Q. What is the waiting time for your supported independent living facilities?**

A. We have a couple of openings right now. The county’s case managers are so overloaded, that filling out housing forms is not always a priority with them.

**Q. Do you have plans to increase the number of beds?**

A. Right now, we’re part of a stakeholders’ steering committee, backed by county and other organizations, to develop priorities for a ten-year Alameda County housing plan to address the needs of the mentally ill.

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<sup>1</sup> WRAP: Wellness Recovery Action Plan.

**Q. Does your program have a policy of not talking to family members?**

A. We encourage consumers to keep in touch with their families. But if they want no contact, then by law—according to the California Welfare and Institutions Code—we have to maintain confidentiality. If the client asks for privacy, we may take a message but may not even be able to acknowledge that the client is there.

“I have the greatest respect for families who take care of their mentally ill members,” Goad said, “because I know the toll it takes.”