

Rubicon Programs Inc. Supports Work, Housing, and Case Management for the Mentally Ill

Summarized by Thomas T. Thomas

A model program for supported work, housing, case management, and group treatment is located nearby in Contra Costa County. This is Rubicon Programs Incorporated, a nonprofit organization whose goals are to assist persons with disabilities and mental disorders and homeless persons in getting back into the mainstream. They run a landscaping service and a bakery that supplies local stores such as Safeway and Andronico's as an integral part of their success in job training, career placement, and housing in both supported and independent living situations. On September 25, **Andrew Brown, PhD**, Director of Client Services, described their programs for us.

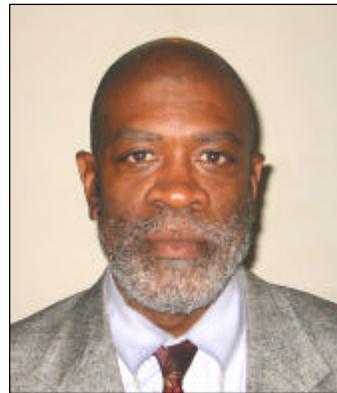
"I've been at Rubicon for 15 years," Dr. Brown said, "having started as an intern in the day treatment program. The organization was established in 1974—just when the mental hospitals were emptying out—to provide services to the hardest to serve, the mentally ill and homeless.

"Originally, Rubicon was a place you could go to. Over the years, we have developed new programs to fill the needs of our clients. Our annual budget has grown from \$5 million to \$15 million."

Although Rubicon serves primarily Contra Costa County residents—because support comes from Medi-Cal, which is administered on a county basis—residents of Alameda and other counties can participate in certain of the programs, such as home health care. They can also participate fully by relocating to Contra Costa.

Rubicon's directive is to make people more independent through training for job opportunities and support for independent living. The organization manages several private businesses, which provide clients with a work background and provide Rubicon with a source of funding. These include:

- Rubicon Landscape Services, which administers contracts at former military bases such as Oakland Army Base, the Palo Alto Veterans Administration Hospital, and Treasure Island. Now, with the closure of many of these bases, they are branching out to commercial and industrial complexes.
- Rubicon Bakery, located on 23rd Street in Richmond, which makes wholesale premium dessert items and has developed accounts as far away as Nevada, Washington, Idaho, and Florida.



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- Rubicon Healthcare Consortium, which in 2001 provided 12,831 hours of home health care to patients in Contra Costa, Alameda, and Marin counties. Through its training program, workers can become Certified Nurse's Assistants and Certified Home Health Aides.

Last year, Rubicon employed 280 people, including 129 clients in its three enterprises. "We will enter people for training in these businesses," Dr. Brown said, "and if at all possible try to keep them." The organization also found jobs for another 438 people through its employment programs. Rubicon runs ten housing sites to serve disabled, homeless, and low-income clients— mostly in shared apartments or family units— and is working on two new sites, including 36 units at the former Treasure Island naval base for homeless families under Catholic Charities of San Francisco.

A major effect of these programs, Dr. Brown said, has been to reduce hospitalization among the mentally ill. "Eighty-one percent of consumers enrolled in our programs for six months did not require hospital or acute crisis care."

Dr. Brown then described each of the Rubicon programs in detail.

Intake Program, located at 2500 Bissell Avenue in Richmond, meets potential clients on a walk-in basis. They take ten people a day and provide an initial interview, orientation about available services, assessment and referral to Rubicon's programs and others available in the community, and offer a voluntary follow-up interview to assess changes in the consumer's situation and perhaps offer additional referrals.

Case Management Services, also at 2500 Bissell, is for homeless adults, families seeking housing and employment, adults with mental illness, and homeless adults living with HIV and AIDS. Case managers work with participants to assess strengths and barriers, develop self-sufficiency programs, and provide information on housing resources. The services include both transitional and permanent housing.

CalWORKS Counseling Program serves former welfare recipients currently receiving Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) and referred by the Employment and Human Services Department. The counseling addresses employment difficulties due to mental health or substance abuse problems.

Career Resource Center, for participants in Rubicon's employment services, offers staff support to help individuals with multiple barriers, comprehensive basic skills and occupational skills assessments, and workshops for resume preparation, job lead development, internet job searches, and interview practice. The center works with the state Department of Rehabilitation to assist mental health consumers.

Fathers At Work Initiative is for low-income, non-custodial fathers 17 to 30 years old. It offers peer support groups to establish a sense of community and help young fathers accept responsibility for their children. The program provides training and employment, child support services, housing support for the homeless, and case management to assist with legal, probation and parole, and life skills issues.

Bridges to Employment is for CalWORKS participants who are in or have graduated from substance abuse and mental health treatment programs. It

provides paid work experience, job placement, intensive case management, peer support and relapse prevention, and upgraded skills for career advancement.

Project Employ provides skills assessment, job preparation and retention workshops, career placement, and post-employment group activities and liaison services.

Money Management Program is for individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for mental health issues and homeless families with mental health, HIV/AIDS, and substance abuse issues. It offers services such as direct deposit of checks, direct payment of housing costs, budget planning, weekly distribution of money for personal needs, savings plans, and future financial planning.

Health, Housing and Integrated Services Network (HHISN) serves homeless individuals and people with a mental illness that does not meet the county's criteria for inclusion in ongoing services. The program provides integrated flexible services in primary health care, mental health and substance abuse, peer counseling, independent living skills, money management, vocational training and employment, and housing placement.

Day Rehabilitation Services, for adults diagnosed with a serious and persistent mental disorder and enrolled in the county's mental health care system, provides individual program planning, daily groups, classes and therapeutic activities, individual and family counseling, psychiatric medication support, pre-vocational training, and social and community events.

After discussing these program, Dr. Brown answered questions.

Do you make housing placements in board-and-care facilities?

No. We have no ties to such facilities, although we may make referrals. However, it's hard to find a board-and-care that is consistent over a number of years. And many of these facilities are now shutting down.

Are most of your clients unskilled? If so, how do you help them get a job?

We have training programs, especially in the Rubicon enterprises, that get the person used to work, to showing up at a certain time each day, and working within their capability. We help them establish a work history and meet the Department of Rehabilitation requirements, which are 20 hours of work per week.

Does your landscaping service do private homes and garden maintenance?

Rubicon does large-scale installations, involving irrigation, tool use, and other requirements that help train participants. They may eventually be placed with other landscaping contractors who do private jobs, but not directly through Rubicon Landscape Services.

What are Rubicon's funding sources?

Our business enterprises supply 44 percent of funding; various government grants and agencies, 38 percent; contributions from foundations, donors, and United Way, 13 percent; and rental and housing-related income, 5 percent.

Since the Intake Program serves people off the street, does the person need to have Medi-Cal or SSI?

We can help them get Medi-Cal support through the Hawkins Center in Richmond. People who apply for Medi-Cal generally get turned down at least once,

so you have to be persistent, and family members can help. It also helps to have medical backup through a psychiatrist.

“People come in to Rubicon and say, ‘I want my own place. I want to work,’” Dr. Brown said in conclusion. “They don’t always know what that might mean. So we say, ‘You need to try it.’ I’ve seen some of the sickest people come into our programs, and I’ve been surprised. Don’t underestimate people who want their independence and are willing to work for it.”