



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 21, 2007

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SAN DIEGO COUNTY FAMILIES BENEFIT FROM PROP. 63 MENTAL HEALTH FUNDS ***Dozens of New Programs Help Thousands of Clients***

Jeffrey Brown had trouble focusing. He lacked motivation. He felt severely depressed. But in his mind, one thing remained clear. He knew he needed help.

“I knew I would not be able to survive without getting help,” said Brown, who was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, a serious mental illness that has features of two different conditions, schizophrenia and an affective—mood— disorder (either major depression or bipolar disorder).

Brown, 20, was referred to Catalyst, one of dozens of new mental health programs created in San Diego County and across California with Proposition 63 funds, approved by voters in 2004. Prop 63, also know as the Mental Health Services Act, imposes a 1 percent tax on personal income above \$1 million for the expansion of mental health programs that have demonstrated their effectiveness, save money, and save lives.

“We have to reach out to vulnerable young people before they fall through the cracks,” said Wesley Chesbro, a commissioner of the state Mental Health Oversight and Accountability Commission, during a news event in San Diego, one of several taking place throughout California to highlight the success of new and innovative programs that were established with MHSA funds.

“This program serves a critical need,” added Chesbro, who was joined by Brown and state and local mental health leaders including Dr. Jennifer Schaffer, Deputy Director of the San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency’s (HHSA) Behavioral Health Division; Alfredo Aguirre, Deputy Director of HHSA’s Mental Health Services; and Cara Evans, Program Manager for Providence Community Services, which manages Catalyst.

Since the passage of MHSA, more than \$1.7 billion has been collected and is in the process of being distributed statewide. San Diego County currently receives about \$36 million annually in MHSA Community Support Services monies. The County has been using the funds to establish several new

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programs for children, young people, adults and older adults.

Prior to receiving MHSA funds, Mental Health Services offered an array of programs for children, adults, and older adults and served about 55,000 clients annually. Mental Health Services created several new and innovative programs and services with MHSA funds and has the capacity to serve 9,000 additional clients.

“We worked very closely with local stakeholders to identify priority services for people with mental illnesses in the county,” said Aguirre. “We’re delighted to see the great impact these programs are having and how they are improving people’s quality of life.”

Mental health illness is extremely common. In any give year, five to seven percent of adults have a serious mental illness and five to nine percent of children have a serious emotional disturbance.

Untreated mental illness is a leading cause of disability and suicide, and imposes high costs to individuals, families, the state, and counties.

Stigma of mental illness is a barrier that discourages individuals and their families from seeking help. Mental Health Services provides a vast array of services including mental health assessments, individual, family, and group therapy, special services for children, crisis intervention and psychiatric emergency care. The County also provides a 24-hour, multi-lingual Access and Crisis Line at (800) 479-3339. Services are confidential and based on the belief that people can and do recover from mental illness.

“Programs like Catalyst allow clients to achieve their highest level of independence in our community,” said Evans.

Catalyst offers 16-25 year olds several mental health services including therapy, medication services, substance abuse treatment, crisis intervention, housing and education assistance, and job development. “This Program provides a wide array or resources to San Diego youth to improve their mental health and help them to take responsibility of their lives and to become more self-sufficient,” added Evans, whose agency also operates Oasis, a member-run clubhouse where youth can learn independent living skills, receive educational and employment assistance, take advantage of several other mental health services, and partake in social and recreational activities.

“We learn a lot,” said Brown, who visits the clubhouse regularly and is getting assistance with getting a job. “I really enjoy coming here.”