



*Photo "Oak and Old Rock Wall" © 2009, Rex A. Naden,
Winner of the Mental Health & Spirituality Art Contest*

PROGRESS REPORT

August 2009

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The **California Mental Health & Spirituality Initiative** was established in June 2008 at the Center for Multicultural Development of the California Institute for Mental Health. It developed out of a grassroots movement founded in 2006 by Jay Mahler and other consumers, family members, and service providers.

We are deeply grateful to the 51 California counties that have supported us financially to date and for the multitude of in-kind contributions from our collaborators. We are committed to providing useful, practical, and timely technical assistance to all of our partners in California's public/private mental health system.

The goals of the Initiative are:

- To increase awareness of spirituality as a potential resource in mental health prevention, intervention, and recovery;
- To advance the capacity of mental health service providers in California to prevent mental health problems and to support individuals and families in recovery by including spirituality as an aspect of cultural competency and natural community supports;
- To encourage collaboration among faith-based organizations, mental health service providers, clients, and families in combating stigma and reducing disparities in access to services for diverse populations; and
- To provide technical assistance to mental health service providers on how to utilize spirituality as a resource for prevention, early intervention and recovery while preserving client/family choice and respecting the separation of church & state.

Please see the attached "Values Statement" which describes our approach.

The remainder of this document provides a status report on the Initiative's progress in our first fourteen months of operation.

FORMING RELATIONSHIPS

- The Initiative is guided by a dedicated team of eight work group (Steering Committee) members:
 - Patty Blum, PhD, CPRP, Crestwood & Dreamcatchers
 - C. Rocco Cheng, Ph.D., Corporate Director of Prevention and Early Intervention Services, Pacific Clinics
 - David Lukoff, PhD, Professor of Psychology, Institute for Transpersonal Psychology and Founder, Spiritual Competency Resource Center
 - Jay Mahler, Consumer Relations Manager, Alameda County Behavioral Healthcare Services
 - Kumar Menon, MSPA, Chief, Community & Government Relations, Office of the Director, Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health
 - Alice J. Washington, Training, Policy, and Research Associate, California Institute for Mental Health
 - Khani Gustafson, MSW, Center for Multicultural Development, California Institute for Mental Health (Project Manager), and

- Rev. Laura Mancuso, MS, CRC, Goleta, CA (Director).
- Most County Behavioral Health Directors have identified a primary point of contact to serve as the liaison between their agency and the Initiative.
- Major statewide client, family, and provider organizations have designated official liaisons to the Initiative (California Network of Mental Health Clients, NAMI California, Racial & Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition, United Advocates for Children & Families, California Alliance of Child & Family Services, California Association of Social Rehabilitation Agencies, California Council Of Community Mental Health Agencies, and California Mental Health Directors' Association).
- We have compiled a distribution list of 1,000 people interested in the topic of mental health & spirituality, to whom we send periodic email updates.

ONLINE ANNOTATED RESOURCE DATABASE

- The Initiative hosts a website at www.mhspirit.org with lists of books, websites, journal articles, and online audio and video resources on the topic of mental health & spirituality. It may be viewed by anyone with access to the Internet. Viewers who create a Google Account and register with the site can comment on what they find there, participate in online discussion forums, and contribute examples of resources they have found helpful.

CONFERENCES ON MENTAL HEALTH & SPIRITUALITY WITH OVER 1,000 PARTICIPANTS

- Unquestionably a highlight of the Initiative's activities to date, two major conferences on Mental Health & Spirituality were held in Oakland and Los Angeles in June 2009. We were delighted with the turnout: **1,111** total participants, including speakers and volunteers. This is an outstanding result, especially given the difficult economic circumstances that have resulted in travel restrictions for many. The audiences included people with mental health issues of all ages; their family members; mental health service providers; and individuals from faith communities (both lay people and clergy). We are very grateful to the local planning committee in Alameda County for hosting the first Northern California conference, and Los Angeles County for their ongoing commitment to the topic and their willingness to collaborate with us to expand their audience in 2009. Video recordings of the keynote speeches and selected workshops have been compiled into a three-DVD set. Complimentary copies were sent to our Organizational Liaisons, and each of the County Behavioral Health Authorities that supported the Initiative. Additional copies are for sale at cost at www.mhspirit.org.

SURVEY OF INDIVIDUALS & FAMILIES RECEIVING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AND COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH DIRECTORS

- A brief written survey was recently conducted to assess the needs, preferences, and experiences of individuals and families receiving public mental health services. The survey was refined with extensive input and assistance from a dedicated group of individuals from our network, including consumers, service providers, and County Liaisons. The survey was translated from English into seven key statewide threshold languages (Spanish, Vietnamese, Hmong, Tagalog, Chinese (Cantonese), Farsi, and Russian). We are especially grateful to Alameda, Los Angeles, Riverside, Butte, and Santa Clara Counties for providing the translation services. Survey results will be posted online at our website in late September.
- Since the opinions of some service recipients are more effectively ascertained through a dialogue process, we are also developing a template for a facilitated dialogue regarding mental health and spirituality. Counties, community-based organizations, and client & family advocacy

groups will have the choice of utilizing the survey form or the community dialogue process or both to gather information. The results will be collected, compiled, and reported by the Initiative.

- The Initiative also conducted structured phone interviews with over 50 County Behavioral Health Directors in Winter 2009 to gather their opinions about spirituality as a potential resource in mental health wellness, recovery, and multicultural competency. The survey interview team included David Lukoff, Kathy Cramer, Elvia McGuire – courtesy of Placer County, Khani Gustafson, and Laura Mancuso. An initial summary of the findings was released at the June 09 conferences and is available online at www.mhspirit.org.

FUTURE PLANS

- Due to the economic downturn, some Counties who wished to make a financial contribution to the Initiative have been unable to do so. We have modified our approach to and timeline for completion of the deliverables accordingly. We are also encouraged by the potential for achieving our goals through in-kind contributions and collaborative arrangements with other organizations. At this point, the Initiative is only fully funded through September 2009, although we are optimistic that we will obtain funding to sustain our activities beyond that date. One of our highest priorities for the future is the development of face-to-face and online training curricula utilizing video footage captured at the June 2009 conferences.

ABOUT CiMH & THE CENTER FOR MULTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The California Institute for Mental Health (CiMH) is a non-profit organization established in 1993 to promote excellence in mental health services through training, technical assistance, research, and policy development. The Center for Multicultural Development (CMD) is a division of CiMH. CMD's goals are to eliminate health/mental health disparities and to promote cultural competence in public mental and behavioral health systems.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE CALIFORNIA MENTAL HEALTH & SPIRITUALITY INITIATIVE, PLEASE CONTACT:

Rev. Laura L. Mancuso, MS, CRC, Director, mancuso@west.net, 805-886-9193,
Khani Gustafson, MSW, Project Manager, kustafson@cimh.org, 916-317-6230,
or visit www.mhspirit.org



VALUES STATEMENT

“...a greater appreciation of the whole person is emerging in the mental health field...”

The California Mental Health & Spirituality Initiative was established in June 2008 at the Center for Multicultural Development of the California Institute for Mental Health. It developed out of a grassroots movement founded in 2006 by Jay Mahler and other consumers, family members, and service providers. The purpose of this document is to state the values that guided the formation, and now operation, of this initiative.

RESPECT FOR ETHICAL AND LEGAL BOUNDARIES. We advocate for the inclusion of spirituality as a potential resource in mental health services. None of our work should be construed as advocating that mental health providers should “push religion” on the people they serve. There are barriers (including political, legal, and cultural) between the public mental health system and spirituality/religion that need to be addressed carefully and respectfully. We are committed to helping service providers understand these barriers so that they can make informed choices about policy and practice. In particular, we believe that mental health providers should never promote a particular religion or proselytize. They should, however, be receptive and responsive to the expressed interests of their clients and potential clients, including their requests for support with the spiritual aspects of their wellness and recovery.

SPIRITUALITY INCLUDES, BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO, RELIGION – There are many ways to define “spirituality” and “religion.” We utilize the following definitions: Spirituality is a person’s deepest sense of belonging and connection to a higher power or life philosophy which may not necessarily be related to a religious institution. A religion is an organization that is guided by a codified set of beliefs and practices held by a community, whose members adhere to a worldview of the holy and sacred that is supported by religious rituals.

SPIRITUALITY IS A CORE COMPONENT OF CULTURAL COMPETENCY – The public/private mental health system in California recognizes that cultural competency, including the ability to understand different worldviews, is necessary for effective practice. Spirituality represents a core value within many ethnic and cultural communities and is often considered a primary resource. Faith-based organizations are a vital source of community leadership for individuals, families, and neighborhoods. Therefore, spirituality can be regarded as an essential connector for ethnic and cultural communities and for understanding wellness, illness, intervention, and recovery. We are committed to the inclusion of multicultural voices that represent California’s broad array of faith traditions and practices.

SPIRITUALITY IS PART OF A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH -- We know that physical health can influence an individual’s mental health. The same is true for spirituality. Understanding spirituality as an element in wellness promotion and mental health recovery brings us closer to dealing with the whole person. Many persons from diverse, multicultural communities utilize spiritual and/or faith-based organizations as a source of social support and hope in their wellness promotion and healing process. Spirituality can be a powerful tool to inspire hope, create motivation,

and promote healing. By integrating spirituality and multicultural factors into prevention and treatment, a greater appreciation of the “whole person” is emerging in the mental health field.

SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES CAN OCCUR DURING ALTERED STATES -- Some people experience altered states with a spiritual component that can support the journey toward wellness and recovery. For some, this can be a life-changing event. Too often, this spiritual component has been ignored, labeled, or confused with delusions or other symptoms. Providers should respond respectfully and appropriately when clients ask for assistance with these experiences.

ENGAGEMENT OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS – Faith communities and spirituality can be a source of coping and social support for those struggling with the impact of mental health issues: poverty, homelessness, loss of meaning and purpose, stigma, isolation, etc. Some faith communities have become “welcoming congregations” to people with mental health issues, and others have adopted mental health advocacy as part of their social justice agendas. Mental health agencies are better able to reach unserved, underserved, and inappropriately served populations when they invite collaboration with local faith-based organizations.

We acknowledge that some individuals and families have experienced traumatic interactions with religious communities. In these instances, it is important to provide a safe environment for talking about these experiences in an open and accepting way.

THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF CLIENT CHOICE – We are passionate about choice – including individuals’ and families’ choice *not* to engage with spirituality and/or religion. Mental health services are enriched by an open, welcoming, and non-judgmental stance toward spiritual, religious, and cultural beliefs, practices, rituals, values, theologies, and philosophies – including non-belief or non-practice -- that may be different from one’s own. We welcome the opportunity to be enriched by the wisdom that others have gleaned from their own spiritual path and/or life experience.

NEED FOR NETWORKING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE -- County mental health authorities and community-based organizations already interact with spirituality and faith-based organizations in numerous ways. We believe they can benefit from knowing more about what other individuals, agencies, and systems are already doing and what results they have had. It is the role of the California Mental Health & Spirituality Initiative to facilitate this technical assistance.

This values statement was revised and adopted by the Work Group on January 20, 2009. Because we are always learning, this values statement will be updated over time as needed.

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