



DIRECTOR'S NEWSLETTER

Welcome. I am glad to be back in San Mateo County. After years of being away, it feels like coming back home. It is so exciting to hear about our programs and how these continue to impact the many individuals and families that come to seek assistance and support from us. It's not often easy to remember what we do well when there is so much going on. It feels like we are just trying to catch up or put out fires. I hope that this newsletter will be a good nudge to remind us of the lives that we change and those which (eventually) change us.

The Director's Newsletter went through a short hiatus because we had to do some reevaluation and planning of our purpose. Every now and then it's good to stop and do some reflection, and now we are back! Read below to catch up on highlights since I returned in March. We have so much to be proud of in BHRS! With this revival, I invite you to [click here](#) to share news, team stories, photos, program shoutouts or other things that you think might be great to share broadly. I want this Director's Newsletter to be informative, meaningful and fun! I want you to feel proud to be part of BHRS!



Dr. Jei Africa

As we welcome 2024, I want to share with you a quote from Francis of Assisi that helps me get through when times are tough: "Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible." So, let's do the impossible.

Dr. Jei Africa, director of Behavioral Health and Recovery Services

Highlights Since March 2023

**66 New Staff
Members Since
March 2023**

New hires include:

- **4** Adult Psychiatrists
- **3** Community Mental Health Nurses
- **12** Marriage and Family Therapists
- **4** Mental Health Counselors
- **4** Psychiatric Residents
- **12** Psychiatric Social Workers

March	●	The Parent Project, a parent and caregiver training program to support and strengthen families, resumed in-person classes after three years of virtual semesters.
April	●	BHRS ODE and the San Mateo County Office of Education offered a Spanish Youth Mental Health First AID (YMHFA) training for the first time since 2018.
May	●	100% compliant Chart Review with Zero Disallowances in Triennial Audit (An all-time first ever achievement).
June	●	Received Behavioral Health Bridge Housing program grant to support the immediate and sustainable housing needs of people experiencing homelessness who have serious behavioral health conditions. Read more in upcoming issues!
July	●	Approval of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Three-Year Plan, which identifies 1) behavioral health needs; 2) strategies to address the needs; and 3) priorities for future MHSA funding.
August	●	The first-ever Youth Mental Wellness Pathways Workshop was piloted, guided by the vision of creating clear, culturally sensitive and empathy-based access – “pathways” – to mental and behavioral health care for youth and their families.
September	●	The 33rd year of “Recovery Happens Month”, a celebration of recovery that educates the public on how treatment can enable those with mental health and substance use challenges to live healthy and rewarding lives.
October	●	The 16th annual Housing Heroes Event honored community partners who have shown exceptional leadership in providing and maintaining housing for community members.
November	●	BHRS is recognized as a “Hall of Fame Honoree” by the Alliance for Community Empowerment (ALLICE), A Filipino American anti-domestic violence advocacy group, at their 20th anniversary gala.
December	●	Service Connect, which provides services aimed at supporting former inmates as they re-enter the community, was awarded the San Mateo County STARS Program Performance Award.

Thank You, BHRS

“I would like to give thanks to San Mateo County, BHRS for helping me continue my journey in recovery. I started my recovery on December 26, 2000. It was the day after Christmas, around midnight, and I was arrested by the East Palo Alto police department because I had a warrant out for my arrest that I was not aware of. I was then taken to McGuire Correctional Facility. While in custody I was asked what was going on in my life that I ended up in jail. I did not know that I was suffering from depression and anxiety from 1996 to 2000 and I was untreated. I thought I was having crying spells and all I wanted to do was die. I had multiple suicide attempts during this time. But finally, I was able to talk to someone and I was offered help. The program was called Drug Court San Mateo County and this program saved my life. That is when my journey of recovery began. I was informed to get into a drug treatment program for my substance abuse and mental health services which I did through Women's Recovery Association (WRA). Along with County Mental Health which is called BHRS today. The clinic I was associated with was called La Selva (Central County). During the process of my recovery, I became pregnant with my daughter, she was my La Selva baby. During my pregnancy, I was connected to a program called Pre to Three. My psychiatrist Dr. Diaz and my Community Worker Yvette La Fleur visited me regularly and helped me tremendously and I really appreciated their support. The prenatal meetings and groups were also helpful. I felt very fortunate to be a part of this wonderful program that helped me stay strong and be a good mom to my daughter. During my pregnancy, I continued to meet monthly with my drug team Judge Barbara Malik and Judge Livermore.

Six months into the program I was in a major car accident and I was hospitalized, I was in my second trimester. I was on bed rest for 3 months and Judge Malik visited me at my apartment and brought me a big bundle of flowers. She was concerned about me, and my baby and she wanted to make sure we were okay. Three months later I delivered my child I was clean, sober, and healthy. Without this program and the wonderful staff that gave me the strength and support, my daughter Toninia Allen and I would not have been a successful story. BHRS, County Drug Court, WRA, and Pre to 3 all came together and helped this young woman who was suffering from PTSD, depression, and anxiety. My daughter has graduated from Sonoma State University and is the first generation to graduate from a university. She graduated with honors and was also on the Dean's list, I am so proud of her. I also want to give a shout-out to my previous supervisor Stephanie Coate who was the one who informed me about Sonoma State University. I am so grateful for San Mateo County, BHRS, and all the other Programs that have helped me through my journey. Thank you for all that you have done for me and for my family. ”

Renee Harris,
Peer Support
Specialist II,
East Palo Alto



Program Spotlight: 27 Years of Prenatal to Three

The Prenatal to Three Initiative (Pre to 3) provides pregnant and postpartum mothers as well as children through age 5 with mental health treatment and social needs resources to promote their well-being. Staff serve women with serious mental illness who require psychotherapy and medication management of their symptoms. In addition, staff provide services designed to support early infant development and improve parent-child relationships in situations in which physical, developmental, or social risk factors are present.

Since 1996, Pre to 3's work has been rooted in a strength-based, relationship-based, trauma-informed care approach that shifts the focus from a "What's wrong with you?" perspective to "What happened to you?". Pre to 3's multidisciplinary team supports this by utilizing innovative techniques that all clinicians are trained in, such as Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), a family-centered approach that helps providers care for children who have experienced trauma, and the advanced psychotherapy approach, Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT). The NMT approach is a revolutionary trauma treatment that focuses on understanding a child's brain development and function through a 'Functional Brain Map'.

DID YOU KNOW...

The County of San Mateo is the first to use NMT in a public behavioral health treatment setting.

With a clearer understanding of how severe trauma may have impacted the development of the brain, Pre to 3 clinicians are better able to support therapeutic needs of children and adults and apply tailored interventions to promote healing and development.

Pre to 3 utilizes a range of sensory activities to promote healing for their clients such as swimming classes, gymnastics, cooking, equine therapy and occupational therapy. Clinicians also use the Integrated Listening System (Focus System) with the support of their Occupational Therapist, a multisensory auditory intervention that uses music and movement to support self-regulation and skill-building for clients with sensory-motor and neurodevelopmental challenges. Pre to 3's decade spanning commitment to support parents and children in San Mateo County have been integral to BHRS's impact today.



The Pre to 3 team in 2023.

Last Spring, Pre to 3 received The Tony Hoffman Community Mental Health Services Award from the Behavioral Health Commission, recognizing their extraordinary difference in the lives of individuals living with mental health challenges and the communities in which they live.