

TMHA in the News

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PEP Center aids in mental health recovery

Center in Atascadero helps connect those with mental illnesses to services that can help

By Aaron Crutchfield

Now with a fresh coat of paint, the People Empowering People center in Atascadero is back open to serve in its aim of helping those with a mental illness on the road to recovery.

“Primarily it’s a place for people who have a mental illness to drop in and spend some time getting support from their peers,” said Hannah Brown with Transitions-Mental Health Association, which runs the center. “One thing that’s common for people who have a mental illness is that they can tend to isolate, so the PEP center is a good first step to recovery.”



Karen Cusworth and Gail Dawson at the PEP Center

Funded through Proposition 63, the Mental Health Services Act, the PEP Center was created to provide a centrally located facility in the North County for the use of people who have a mental illness, family members of people with a mental illness and Mental Health Services Act program staff. This is done in a drop-in style, where anyone who needs it can just stop by the center.

“We have a lot of folks that come from the local homeless shelter or are referred through County Mental Health or from North County Connection,” said Barry Johnson, T-MHA director of rehabilitation and advocacy programs. “Folks come to make a meal together, play cards together, attend a support group, and we also have vocational groups where we’ll bring in an employment specialist. We do arts and crafts, we’ll watch a movie and we’ll do barbecues. The idea is to provide a safe place where folks that maybe aren’t connected with some of the mental health services in the community, this is a way they can get linked in.”

The center first opened in March 2008 and since then, more than 400 people have utilized what the center has to offer.

“There’s a gentleman who was homeless and out of work and wasn’t connected with mental health services,” Johnson said. “He came into the PEP center and got connected with mental health services through Transitions, and also got connected to employment services through our agency and started to become a driver in one of our programs, where he drives other clients around to their appointments, and now he’s got his housing and this has all happened within the past year.”

The PEP Center is located at 5385 El Camino Real and is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

“I think the social aspect of the center and the ability to meet with other people is probably the greatest benefit,” Brown said. “And the location is a big deal, because it’s something that hasn’t

existed in this area for people who need it. Rather than having to drive over the grade or find someone to give you a ride, that support is now in Atascadero."

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