

# MCAVHN

Providing service and comfort to people affected by HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C

MENDOCINO COUNTY AIDS / VIRAL HEPATITIS NETWORK

Fall 2018

## *Sometimes Taking Care of Basic Needs Comes First*

The Whole Person Care Project

By Susan McLean

MCAVHN's mission has evolved over the years, first providing assistance and comfort to persons with AIDS, then including those with hepatitis C, and often along the way dealing with homelessness, substance use and mental illness. The year 2018 brought an exciting opportunity for MCAVHN to expand services in line with our evolving mission and to hire three additional staff members, thanks to the Whole Person Care Project.

Recently hired Wellness Coach Kathi Heath explains that the program was set up to reduce the drain on emergency room visits, hospital stays and encounters with law enforcement. But before describing the program in detail, Kathi made it known that "This is the kind of work I tell people I would do if I won the lottery and could volunteer my time. I'd do the kinds of things I'm doing now."

The two Wellness Coaches meet with each client to develop goals such as stabilizing medical care, finding housing and accessing a variety of essential services. Then, as Kathi says, "We do whatever is necessary to help clients meet their goals." This can include everything from making medical appointments, driving clients to their appointments, ensuring follow up with their medical care and connecting them with different agencies to get the services they need, such as housing or legal services. If a client has medical needs, the program can sometimes put them in a hotel. Others may get help being placed at a campground. "So", Kathi adds, "it can look like me running down to the river and loading up all their stuff in the car and taking them out to a campground and helping them get set up out there."

Kathi describes what a typical day looks like, saying "One day we may drive a hundred miles. I just drove someone to Vallejo the other day to take care of some tickets, so he could get his driver's license, so then he could get a job. The next day I drove someone else to Santa Rosa to an orthopedic appointment. On Wednesdays I'm picking up lots of clients and taking them to the food bank." She shares the story of a client who was able to stay in a hotel through two surgeries and whose

health is now stabilized. Just having access to a bathroom can have a huge impact on recovery from medical issues. Even for those without medical needs, being able to take a shower means a lot.

Wellness Coach Geoffrey Aringdale adds other details describing a day in the life of a wellness coach. A typical day at MCAVHN begins with a morning meeting when staff gets together to talk about the goals and needs for each client.

One particular morning, Geoffrey's first client, who has co-occurring disorders but had been clean for a while, was the topic of discussion. He's currently homeless, so he spends a lot of time at MCAVHN. He's hoping to see his daughter again soon. Geoffrey helped him apply for jobs, and he had just been hired by a local retailer. Together they went to the library, where the client checked his email. He had a confirmation letter from his new job, so Geoffrey could send that letter on to another agency to find out what additional assistance his client could receive.

Geoffrey describes another client who was riding a bike and got hit by a car. He couldn't walk. He was in a wheel chair. He also has a number of co-morbid conditions, including being in prison for 18 years. After his release 8 years ago, he's been on the street since. "It's all he knows", Geoffrey says, "but he's doing well now. He does still smoke marijuana, but he doesn't use any type of hard substances. I have him in a hotel. His surgery went really well. He's been going to physical therapy. He's been taking his medications. Today I took him to his physical therapy appointment. I spent some time with him. He's been recycling too. He's been able to get back on his bike. So I helped him to go recycle so he could get some money."

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not **PERFECTION**

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### Sometimes taking care

By late afternoon, it's back to the office to write notes: then comes all the compliance and data entry, keeping up client charts, Medi-Cal certification checks every month and other necessary documentation. Balancing the endless human needs of clients with paperwork, billing and compliance is a universal challenge for helping professionals. For many years, MCAVHN volunteers and board members have stepped in to fill the void but now with the Whole Person Care Project, MCAVHN has been able to hire Rosalynn Ibarra as a Compliance and Project Assistant.

Rosie came to the Whole Person Care Project after graduating from Sacramento State with a bachelor's degree in social work. She had always wanted to "come back home to Ukiah and pay it forward and work at a non-profit". Her position at MCAVHN "works both ways for me because I have a clerical background, but I also have a human services background. I'm able to do both of those together."

From a young age Rosie volunteered at Plowshares, 2BU Clothes Closet and the Youth Project. While working on her Associate's degree in human services at Mendocino College, she was employed doing clerical work at the college and aided in the organization of program events such as New Student Orientation, Career Fairs, Welcome Week, University Day and campus tours. She also assisted in the counseling department making sure students received all services throughout campus to ensure emotional and physical well-being and academic success.



Geoffrey Aringdale

Kathi came to MCAVHN with a degree in business and job experience in the social services field. Geoffrey came via a different path. With an Associate's degree in pe-law from Miami Dade College and a few semesters at Florida International University, he moved from Florida to California and ended up homeless for two months. He was able to get back on his feet, was never involved in drug addiction and never had the multiple issues of a dual diagnosis, but the experience gave him a first-hand understanding of an experience common to many MCAVHN clients-homelessness.



Rosalynn "Rosie" Ibarra

When these three new employees were asked about the impact that working at MCAVHN has had on them personally, Geoffrey said, "It's helped me understand how a lot of organizations work. Anybody could be put in a position of homelessness-through the fires, the hurricanes happening now, or other issues. It's good for people to understand that there's resources out there and there's people to help you."

Rosie stated that she's the newest member of the team and still getting to know the clients. She keeps things running smoothly from an organizational and compliance perspective and also loves working with the clients. She appreciates that "At MCAVHN, every day is different. You never know what's going to happen throughout the day."

Kathi Heath

Kathi ends by saying "I love working at MCAVHN because we get to work with the client right where they are at that moment. They don't have to already have started recovery. Almost no other agency has that, where they can work with them right where they are at. They don't have to be clean first. We see a lot of people start setting good goals for themselves. That want to become clean. They want to do those things, but sometimes taking care of basic needs comes first, and we get to do that."



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