A Matter of Balance

Since our inception 32 years ago, doing what’s right for the participant has been our primary filter through which all decisions, large and small, are made. When major events affecting Social Model Recovery Systems appear, it is sometimes hard to remember that we have always found our balance in the concept of person-centered services.

With our focus firmly on persons served, FY16-17 has been yet another period of growth and change for us. With a start date of July 1, 2017, Los Angeles County’s conversion to the Drug MediCal System of reimbursement is in full swing. At first blush, it would seem to simply be a change in which one of the federal agencies is paying the bill - switching from SAMHSA to CMS. To make this assumption would be to miss the myriad critical nuances of the shift. Every aspect of our system of care is being affected during this conversion. New referral sources, methods of diagnosis, types of documentation, systems of record keeping, lengths of stay, service codes, and reimbursement rates have all been drastically altered. In order to keep balance between the wants of the County with the needs of persons served, we have actively participated in all aspects of the County’s conversion process and are proud to report that Social Model Recovery Systems was one of only a handful of agencies asked to participate in the beta testing of the County’s emerging system of care.

The act of remaining in dynamic balance requires a state of continuous change. These adjustments, large and small, come from outside forces as well as within the organization. This year was no different and we were given the opportunity to check our balance one more time when our long-serving CEO, Jim O’Connell, shared with the Board of Directors his desire to retire. Fortunately, a number of years ago, in anticipation of this very event, the Board had approved a formal Plan of Succession for the agency. Board President, Jerry Brown, called a special session of the group and in a delightful display of collective wisdom, unanimously chose Bruce Boardman, long-time Senior Director of Treatment Services, to be our next CEO. Fortunately for all, Mr. Boardman accepted the position and is already creating his own leadership team to take us to the next level. Bruce will be only the third person to have held this position in our 32-year history. During this transition period, President Brown and the Board, with Bruce’s gracious support, asked if Jim would temporarily remain on staff as a Special Projects Consultant. Jim gratefully accepted. Many of us - including Jim - are anxiously waiting to see how he handles transitioning to “civilian life”.

All of these changes serve once again as a wonderful reminder to us all of the importance of maintaining balance in our lives. Experience has taught us that this act of balance can be most readily performed with the support of a power greater than ourselves.

Sincerely,

Bruce Boardman
Chief Executive Officer

James L. O’Connell
CEO Emeritus

Gerald Brown
Board President
PARTICIPANT SPOTLIGHT

MIKE JONES

Mike Jones has been a participant of Social Model Recovery Systems for ten years.

Before entering our system of care, he was homeless on the streets of Pasadena. Before he found himself homeless, Mike lead a productive life owning a body shop and restoring old Porsches in Huntington Beach. But his drinking and effects of his unattended schizophrenia resulted in him losing everything and he eventually became homeless.

While he lived on the streets, Mike began hearing voices. He would hear helicopters in the sky telling him that he was going to have a million dollars. He also thought he saw dead bodies in dumpsters and smelled burning flesh. He was convinced that the police department were cannibals. When “seeing” the bodies, he would call the police, and by the time the police arrived, the bodies were gone. After reporting seeing dead bodies a few times (and there being nothing when the authorities arrived), the police assisted in getting Mike to a hospital and treatment.

After several episodes in jail for various misdemeanors and public intoxication, he finally surrendered to his Higher Power, praying to lift his obsession to drink. His last stay in jail was to follow, with no shakes, no detox, and no desire to drink alcohol.

While in jail Mike was referred to River Community to help him with his co-occurring conditions. When he finally arrived at the program he looked around and thought, “I could do a year here!” He didn’t need a year; after spending five months experiencing sobriety and learning coping skills for his schizophrenia, Mike transferred to a Social Model sober living while continuing his treatment at River Community Covina. He continues to this day in our River Community Wellness program.

For years, even in sobriety, Mike often slept in his clothes because he wasn’t used to taking them off to go to bed at night. On his one-year sobriety birthday, Mike lost his brother. Mike says, “My brother died of alcoholism on my first sobriety birthday; that was a God shot for me to remain sober.”

Mike now has an AA home group in Duarte and is an active member of a church where he met his beautiful sweetheart Janet. She was a caregiver to her parents, and says that, “Everybody’s got something they struggle with, no matter how normal they look or how perfect their lives may seem.”

Mike has a son whom he hadn’t communicated with for many years while he was drinking and homeless. Today, ten years later, they have an amazing relationship, talking or texting at least once a week.

Mike still lives with some paranoia, so going to new places is a test for him but he’s working through those challenges. Mike says, “Once I was in God’s will instead of self-will, stuff started falling into place for me. River Community saved my life. It taught me about my schizophrenia.”

Mike was recently honored as one of three finalists for the inspirational ACHSA Award at the Los Angeles Biltmore Hotel.
**Melanie Arellano**

Melanie Arellano is the Program Director of the Agency’s Mariposa program, holding that position since 2007. Not unlike most of our participants as well as many of our staff, Melanie’s story has taken her from the throes of addiction to a productive and helpful member of society.

Many years ago, Melanie found herself homeless and without her son, who had been taken by the Department of Children and Family Services. She knew things needed to change in her life but didn’t know how or when. She remembers as a child always waiting and waiting for her father to show up but he never did; he later died of alcoholism. She didn’t want her own child to experience that same pain so she decided that the best thing to do was forfeit her rights as a mother. She had made the decision that she was going to give her son up for adoption. Melanie had no hope for herself but there were two people who believed in her when she didn’t believe in herself -- her son’s foster mother and Melanie’s grandfather.

Melanie first learned about Mid Valley Recovery Services from her grandfather who was in recovery himself. He told her about Mariposa, a women’s residential treatment program, in June, 2000. Desperate for change, Melanie remained on a waiting list for Mariposa and was required to call and check in every day to stay on that waiting list. So, on every day that is exactly what she did. She ran back and forth between the pay phone and her hotel room in hopes that she wouldn’t be seen by anybody. (She was also wanted by the police at the time.)

The day finally came when Mariposa had a bed available for Melanie. It was on a Monday but she wasn’t sold completely on going into treatment just yet. It wasn’t until Friday of that same week when she decided to turn her will and her life over. This took place after a conversation that she’d had with her grandfather who told her that he could no longer stand around and watch her trade her son in for drugs.

Some of the first memories Melanie has of Mariposa was meeting Maria Burboa (who made her the best sandwich she had ever had in her life) and having her laundry washed and folded for her soon after she arrived.

In addition to seeing if she could find some recovery in her life, Melanie had two other major goals and commitments: she needed to complete 280 hours community service with Caltrans and try to get her baby son back. The order for community service came from a judge who wanted Melanie’s punishment to be punitive, so he ordered the service to be completed within 90 days. With this heavy sentence, Melanie was sure that she wouldn’t be allowed to stay at Mariposa and would
need to be discharged. But instead, the Program Director of Mariposa compassionately decided that she was going to work with Melanie to make sure that she stayed in treatment and still took care of all her legal responsibilities. Melanie woke up every morning at 4am and then took the bus to work eight hours a day with Caltrans. She would then come back to Mariposa to work on her treatment plan, engage in one-on-ones with her counselor, participate in other activities, and always went to a 12 Step meeting at night.

Before completing the program at Mariposa, Melanie had finished all of her community service, paid off her restitution, and even had a job. She began working at a local food distribution center, got bonded, and eventually worked there for three years. Melanie was in treatment at Mariposa for nine months, got continual visits from her social worker, and upon completion in March, she got her baby boy Vincent back. She then lived with her baby at the Sabina House Sober Living. She did everything she was supposed to do, and one year later, Melanie was able to get her own apartment. Through the Family Preservation Program, she got Vincent back completely and within three years, Melanie was encouraging other women and taking them to meetings, was a member of the community board, and was volunteering her time to help with graveyard shifts at Mariposa.

It was during this time of being of service that Melanie realized that she wanted to be a counselor herself … and that’s exactly what she did. She completed school at The CAARR Institute and began working graveyard shifts at Mariposa in 2003. Melanie always had a passion for helping women (especially those who had experienced trauma) and she knew that she needed to do her best because she had people’s lives in her hands. After some time of doing what she loved, Melanie felt tired and burnt out so she took a break for a year to work somewhere else. But her heart was in Mariposa and she soon returned, this time having enough experience to train as a new supervisor as well as act as a “stand-in” supervisor when that person left. There was no question that Melanie was made for the role of Mariposa Program Director.

After the merger with Social Model Recovery Systems, Melanie felt as if Mariposa and the rest of Mid Valley Recovery Services found their home. Today, Melanie’s goal is to help the women who are struggling with addiction, trauma, and abuse with the same level of compassion that she received when she first walked through the doors of Mariposa in 2000. She is excited about her growth and accomplishments, but to be able to watch someone else change is the reason why she keeps doing what she does. If Melanie had all the money in the world, she would open up more beds to help more women. Melanie keeps the same traditions at Mariposa today … when a woman comes into treatment, she is greeted warmly and has all her laundry cleaned and folded for her when she first arrives.

She pays great homage to her grandfather who had a great influence on Melanie’s life and who also supported her throughout. Melanie will soon be enrolling in school at Pacific Oaks in Pasadena to become a Marriage and Family Therapist and is a grandmother to 1-year-old Scarlette.
Programs at a Glance

All programs strive to offer a continuum of treatment to our participants at 16 locations

BIMINI (LOS ANGELES) - Residential, substance abuse, men and women
CCERP (LOS ANGELES) - Work to improve health and wellness in the communities adjacent to LAC+USC Medical Center.
DRUG FREE ANAHEIM (ANAHEIM) - Outreach, assisting individuals into treatment
EDUCATION & TRAINING (COVINA) - Local, regional, and statewide trainings
MARIPOSA (EAST LOS ANGELES) - Residential (and sober living), substance abuse, women and women with children
MID VALLEY OUTPATIENT (EL MONTE) - Outpatient, substance abuse, men and women
OMNI (EL MONTE) - Residential (and sober living), substance abuse, men
PASADENA COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM - Outpatient, substance abuse and mental health, men and women
RENA B (LOS ANGELES) - Residential, substance abuse, men and women
RIVER COMMUNITY (AZUSA) - Residential, co-occurring disorders, men and women
RIVER COMMUNITY COVINA (COVINA) - Outpatient, co-occurring disorders and substance abuse, men and women
RIVER COMMUNITY WELLNESS (COVINA) - Outpatient, co-occurring disorders, men and women
ROYAL PALMS (LOS ANGELES) - Residential, substance abuse, men
STEPPING STONES (COVINA) - Residential (and sober living), substance abuse, women and women with children
TOUCHSTONES (ORANGE) - Residential and Outpatient, co-occurring and substance abuse, adolescent male and female
UCEPP (LOS ANGELES) - Challenge systemic conditions and social disparities through community organizing
FROM SMRS LEADERSHIP with the Board of Directors his desire to retire. Fortunately, a number of years ago, in anticipation of this very President Brown and the Board, with Bruce’s gracious support, asked if Jim would temporarily remain on staff Bruce will be only the third person to have held this position in our 32-year history. During this transition period, Boardman accepted the position and is already creating his own leadership team to take us to the next level. Bruce Boardman, long-time Senior Director of Treatment Services, to be our next CEO. Fortunately for all, Mr. New referral sources, methods of diagnosis, types of documentation, systems of record keeping, lengths for us. With a start date of July 1, 2017, Los Angeles County’s conversion to the Drug MediCal System of called a special session of the group and in a delightful display of collective wisdom, unanimously chose given the opportunity to check our balance one more time when our long-serving CEO, Jim O’Connell, shared and small, come from outside forces as well as within the organization. This year was no different and we were A Matter of Balance. We seek to understand and accept our own limitations. We remain open to the views, truths, and experiences of others; it is humility which allows us to listen to what they can offer. When we concede that we do not have the answer to every question, trust can begin when we seek out others who may provide additional insight. – SMRS Core Belief #8