

Dixon Tribune

By Joleen Hammell
February 9, 2007

Those battling depression or other mental health issues are now finding it easier to cope and integrate themselves back into “normal” life by enrolling in programs offered by Dixon Wellness and Recovery Center—one of three new centers sponsored by Solano County, the Crestwood Behavioral Health in San Francisco, and the Dreamcatcher Empowerment Network.

“The system is often daunting and difficult to maneuver,” Crestwood Campus Administrator Gail McDonald said. “We try to help (mental health consumers) from getting lost in the system.”

The Wellness and Recovery Center offers several services focused on a person-centered recovery in a learning environment while partnering with local community agencies to address individuals’ needs.

Programs help individuals work towards community reintegration with recovery education, vocational skill building, peer mentoring, computer training, community linkages, family and support training, mobility training, warm line support, and the opportunity for paid employment at a range of levels.

“Most of our consumers have not had a job in a long time” due to community stigma revolving around their symptoms, McDonald said. “Since opening, 25 percent of the folks we’ve been serving our on the Dreamcatcher payroll.”

One of the key elements of success, McDonald said, is the consumers’ ability to direct their own recovery. Individuals are encouraged to set their own goals based on what recovery means for them and what makes them feel empowered.

“We teach our consumers not to focus on the symptoms, but to focus on their goals,” McDonald said.

Dixon Wellness and Recovery Center serves both individuals already documented in the mental health system, as well as walk in consumers who may be depressed, have suffered from spousal abuse, have substance abuse issues, or are out of work and have not yet sought help.

After hurting her dominant hand on the job, Lorena Salinas of Dixon underwent surgery that left her unable to work for two years while she underwent physical therapy and recovery.

“I am usually a happy-go-lucky and positive person,” Salinas said. “I was pretty independent, but then I was having to depend on my mother and sister for help (with everyday activities).

“All of a sudden I had isolated myself,” Salinas remembered. “I didn’t want people to see me hurt or to ask me 50 questions about my injury.”

One day, after being persuaded by her mother and sister to join them on a trip to Costco, Salinas ran into a woman who had frequented her old work. The woman was employed by Nueva Vida—

meaning New Life—the division of Dixon Wellness and Recovery that caters to the bilingual population. The woman encouraged her to participate in some of the programs the center was offering to get Salinas out of the isolation she was creating for herself.

After attending a talk given by members of the police force, Salinas found herself getting more and more involved with what the center had to offer.

During this time, Salinas was also in search of employment—but was having no luck finding anything due to what she feels was her “open honesty about (her) limitations.”

After much time spent praying, both on her own and with her prayer group, Salinas was offered an unexpected position—a job working as a peer specialist at the Vallejo Wellness and Recovery Center.

“It was a blessing in disguise,” Salinas said. “I finally see myself in a rewarding place in my life. I was losing confidence in myself, and now I look forward to coming to work everyday.”

The best part about her job, Salinas said, is the opportunity to help other people who are where she once was.

“We feel there is nothing more powerful than a consumer telling another consumer how they made it,” McDonald said. “Ninety percent of our employees have a consumer background.”

For more information on the Wellness Recovery Centers of Dixon, Vallejo, and Fairfield, contact Brittani Polivka at 415.293.2802