

PROJECT RETURN: THE NEXT STEP

NOVEMBER 1, 2002

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INTRODUCTIONS TO THE REGIONS

ANTELOPE VALLEY REGION
David Glenn, Regional Aide

Club Aides: Myra Carreno, David Glenn, Guadalupe Bellini, Kim Pryor, Mary Rogers, Eleanor Matis, Stephan Pisula

Clubs: Beyond the Light, Pink and Black Triangle Society, Schizophrenics Anonymous (3), Grupo Nueva Esperanza, Weekenders, Acoustical Music Group, Up's and Down's (2), Anxiety Club, High Desert Friendship Club

Antelope Valley is a large region, and at present most of our focus is in Lancaster or Palmdale, at the Discovery Center or the Friendship Center respectively. Eight of our twelve clubs meet at one of these centers.

I would like to focus on the four clubs that meet in other locations.

Beyond the Light is a club for transitional age youth. It meets at Transitional Youth Services in Lancaster. The members often graduate into the Discovery Center or the Friendship Center. One of the Schizophrenics Anonymous groups meets at the Antelope Valley Hospital in Lancaster, and the other meets at Henry Mayo Hospital in Valencia. Many of the members of the group are currently in the hospital or have been patients in the hospital in the past. The Pink & Black Triangle Society meets at the Metropolitan Community Church in Palmdale. This club has been growing and attracting gays and lesbians from the surrounding community in part due to a vigorous outreach campaign spearheaded by the members.

I see my position as regional aide as offering support to all the clubs, and supporting the club aides in any program needs that they might have. I also support the clubs by doing outreach, through presentations, through the media, and by individual contact. For example, I was recently on our local news program, *A.V. Today*, and I talked about PR:TNS and the Discovery Center as well as our various clubs.

I believe that participating in clubs is an example of a person choosing to be well. Through self-help we gain self-empowerment, and we begin to take charge of our lives again. PR:TNS accepts all people, at whatever stage of recovery they are, and helps each person to move forward.

I am excited to be part of PR:TNS, and I am excited about our upcoming peer mentor program that will reach out to board and care members one-on-one. When I was struggling, Project Return was there for me. It gives me great joy to now be able to be there for others.

DOWNTOWN/MID WILSHIRE REGION
Stephen Rivera, Regional Aide

Club Aides: Amparo Matos, Gwendolyn White, Ralph McFadden, Inyoung Choe
Ruth Schlegel, Arthur Corre, Rosemarie Lee, Jeanne Colbert, Pat
Lampkin

Clubs: Latinos Unidos, Active Ones, Match Club, Happy Club, Pink & Black
Triangle Society, Phoenix Committee, Blue Diamond Club,
MidWilshire Club, Schizophrenics Anonymous, LAMP Club, Ups and
Downs, Self-Help Group, Survivors II

Summary:

The Downtown/Mid Wilshire Region has grown in size since I started as a Regional Aide two years ago. We meet in a variety of locations, and I am pleased to report that we have a lot of support from staff who encourage consumers to attend the various clubs.

One of our clubs (Happy Club) meets at a board and care, and another (Blue Diamond Club) meets in an independent living facility. Three of the clubs (Active Ones, Match, and LAMP Clubs) meet at community centers. The Mid Wilshire Club meets at the Mariposa Club House, a psychosocial rehabilitation center, and Schizophrenics Anonymous meets at the Hollywood Recreation Center. Latinos Unidos (Spanish club) meets at Downtown Mental Health as does Survivors II, and Phoenix Committee meets at Asian Pacific Counseling and Treatment Center. Our two newest clubs, Ups and Downs and Self-Help Group meet at Hollywood Mental Health.

Recent regional activities include trips to the beach, local museums, and picnics and barbecues in local parks. We also encourage members to participate in the PR:TNS trips and our countywide UNO tournament. We provide travel training so that no one need remain isolated or is unable to participate.

In the future I would like to open more recovery groups, such as Dual Diagnosis, and I am looking for a facility which would provide us with a space and help us promote the group. I would also like to expand the number of Spanish groups we have in our region.

My main focus is to assist my club aides in fostering independence in our members and in helping members lead more active lives in the community.

EAST LOS ANGELES/NORTHEAST REGION
Elisa Zamir, Regional Aide

Club Aides: Irma Montoya, Robert Kensi, Anne Adie, Mona Hidalgo, Fortino Alatorre, Gloria Tavaréz, Elsa Roman, and Leander Bunch

Clubs: Grupo Los Toros (*Spanish*), Searchers Club, Highlanders Club, Jonathan Diamond Club, Grupos Las Damas Y Caballeros (*Spanish*), Consumer Council N.E. Club, Crestview Club, Unidos en el Bienestar (*Spanish*), Los Amigos Club

Summary:

There are nine clubs in the East Los Angeles/Northeast Region. Three of the clubs conduct meetings in Spanish; one of the clubs is bilingual, and the remaining five clubs meet in English.

Five of the clubs meet in board and cares. Grupo Los Toros and Highlanders Club meet at the Highland Park Guest Home, and the Crestview Club meets at Crestview Lodge. Los Amigos meets at Discovery Four, and Searchers meets at Twin Palms. Grupo Las Damas Y Caballeros meets at Salazar Park, and the Jonathan Diamond Club meets at a community center (Centro Maravilla). The final club, Consumer Council N.E. meets at the Northeast Clinic, a mental health center.

When I visit the clubs, I participate in the activities and support the club aide in any way that I can. For example, Jonathan Diamond members meet weekly and decide on where they want to go. Recently, they decided to go to the Montebello Mall. We had lunch first and socialized, and then we walked around the mall and did some shopping. This way the members stay active and avoid isolating.

The Las Damas y Caballeros meets at a park in East Los Angeles, and we do arts and crafts. Sometimes we do needlework, and some people crochet. We have coffee and sweetbreads, and we socialize by playing table games. This is a pleasant way for people to get to know one another, by sharing a common interest.

Another Spanish speaking club is Unidos En El Bienestar. This club meets outside the Santa Marta Church where there are benches and tables. When the weather is nice, we like to sit outside in the fresh air. We like to socialize, and we talk about our week. We listen to one another's concerns, and we encourage one another to confront our problems. We practice self-help.

Each club is different, and each club encourages members to express what it is they want and need. Together we learn to enjoy life again, not simply endure.

LONG BEACH REGION
Alan Anderson, Regional Aide

Club Aides: Mark Escarcega, Jim Freeda, Jenny Mitchell, William Chua, Ed Ellis-Compton, Andi Peraza, Gloria Fristad, Stephanie Ackerman, Frank Uribe, Roy Pickernell, Patti Rittenbaugh

Clubs: Computer Geeks, Movie Cannibals, Pink & Black Triangle Society, Ups and Downs, Schizophrenics Anonymous, Day Breakers, Smoke Free, Friendship Club, Discovery Club, Moonlighters, Windjammers, Scandia

Summary

The Long Beach region is deeply influenced by the Discovery Center. Many of the clubs meet there, and many members travel there from all over the Long Beach region and beyond. Despite its presence, however, there is a need for clubs in the community. The spirit of Project Return: The Next Step is one of inclusiveness, and some people still have difficulty traveling on their own, so it's important that PR:TNS reach out to them.

My goal is to start more socialization and self-help clubs in the community. I plan to start two clubs at two of the board and cares in Long Beach, Bay Breeze and Shabon. I also want to start a club for people, many of whom are senior citizens who have a diagnosis of mental illness, who live at Plymouth West.

Some of the clubs we have in existence already meet in board and cares. The Pink & Black Triangle Society, which is for gays and lesbians who have a diagnosis of mental illness, meets at a community center. Day Breakers meets at the Department of Mental Health. Windjammers meets in an apartment complex for independent living. The other clubs meet at the Discovery Center.

Regional outings are planned monthly. We go on shopping trips, on picnics, and to local events. We also attend holiday parties at the Discovery Center, and many of our members sign up to go on the special trips planned by PR:TNS. As one of our members expressed this: "If you have an idea about a trip or outing, Project Return can help make it happen!"

I can honestly say that there is something worthwhile for a member to do in the Long Beach region every day of the week, three hundred sixty-five days of the year.

NORWALK/WHITTIER REGION
Duncan Hinkley, Regional Aide

Club Aides: Marc Prokop, Patricia Smith, Stephanie Ackerman, Denise Martinez-Cheng

Clubs: Eagles, Villa Flora, Villa Luren, Oasis/Metro Club, Schizophrenics Anonymous, Rat Pack, Founders, (new club is opening soon at Imperial Manor)

Our region is small, and many of the club members know each other now from having attended clubs and regional activities for some time. In some ways, it's like a family. As regional aide, I supervise the club aides, support the members, and facilitate some of the clubs.

Four of the clubs meet at board and cares. The Eagles Club meets at the C.M.A. Apartments in Artesia. Villa Luren Club meets at Villa Luren in Whittier. Founders Club meets at Founders Home in Artesia, and Villa Flora Club meets at Villa Flora in Whittier. The Oasis Club meets at Metropolitan State Hospital in Norwalk. Schizophrenics Anonymous meets at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in Downey. Rat Pack meets at La Casa in Long Beach.

Here is an example of the difference one group can make in people's lives. I facilitate Founders, which is mainly a socialization club for adults who live in a board and care. Since the club was started, there has been a computer group developed for members as well as a photography group. Without PR:TNS these groups might not have been started, because the members learned to communicate their needs by being part of the club. Project Return helped empower the consumers to become more active in their board and care.

Another club that makes a difference is Rat Pack. This is another socialization club for adults that I facilitate at La Casa. On Thursday nights we all go to the gym to play basketball, board games, have snacks, and learn about PR:TNS outings and other activities in the area. Members say that this meeting is a "breath of fresh air" from outside the facility that gives them a welcome break from their usual routine.

Whether facilitating a club meeting, or visiting one of the clubs as regional aide, I am inspired by the improvements I see in our members. I see people learning to get along with people that are not of their race or color. I have also seen members helping one another deal with problems. Besides socialization, there is a growing self-help component in our clubs that is very satisfying. Helping yourself by helping others is more than just a slogan!

SAN FERNANDO VALLEY REGION
Edgar De La Fuente, Regional Aide

Club Aides: Todd Herman, Maria Martell, Hiki Atualeuao, Mary Morris, Alan Hier, John King, Doug Kohut

Clubs: Grupo Bilingue (*bi-lingual*), Quest Club, Overcomers Club, The Villagers Club, Friendship Club, Victory Club, Schizophrenics Anonymous, Up's and Down's Club

Summary:

One goal in the San Fernando Valley Region is to provide an enjoyable program where members feel comfortable. We also want members to know that they share similar experiences with club aides and regional aides as well as other staff at PR:TNS. We are role models showing that recovery is possible.

We will be opening a new club in Pacoima, and I am networking with Santa Clarita Mental Health and a board and care in North Hollywood (New Horizons) to open clubs there.

Seven of our clubs are socialization/recreation clubs; the other two are self-help groups. Up's and Down's and Schizophrenics Anonymous are both held at the Center for Family Living (CFL), which is a community center in Van Nuys. Also in Van Nuys is the PR:TNS club at Victory Club House, and the Buffalo Club, which is held at a board and care (Sepulveda Residential). Grupo Bilingue and the Overcomers Club are located at San Fernando Mental Health Services, a mental health clinic in Mission Hills. The Villagers Club is held at Hillview Mental Health Clinic in Lakeview Terrace. The Quest Club is held at the Institute for Living at the Northridge Hospital, and the Friendship Club is held at Topanga West, which is a board and care.

Regional events are planned monthly, and have recently included barbecues at Balboa Lake, fishing at Castaic Lake, and a regional UNO tournament. Future plans include a trip to the snow this winter.

In our region we focus on reaching out to people in board and cares and clinics and offering them easily accessible opportunities to socialize. We believe that by sharing our own positive outlook, we can influence others to begin to see some hope for a more optimistic future. Members tell us that the clubs have made a real difference in the quality of their lives, and it shows!

SAN GABRIEL VALLEY REGION
Gustavo Rodriguez, Associate Director

Club Aides: Keith Du Bois, Tom Rayle, Johnny Safina, Armen Baghdoyan, Charles Argento, Juan Almonte, Anna Martinez

Clubs: The Socialites Club, Friendship Club, Colorado Rockies Club, Ingerayin Agump (*Armenian*), Positive Directions Club, Old Towne Club, Grupo Nuevo Amanecer (*Spanish*), Looney Tunes 5 to 7

Summary

The goals in the San Gabriel Valley Region are to start two Schizophrenics Anonymous Clubs, one in Spanish and one in English. We will also be starting an Ups and Downs club for people with bipolar or unipolar disorders.

We are also planning to expand to several cities where there are currently no PR:TNS clubs. The region is large, extending from Glendale to Pomona. In the near future, we will be starting clubs in El Monte, Pomona, and West Covina.

As part of our outreach, we are also helping consumers become more independent in traveling by themselves, using public transportation.

Five of the existing clubs meet in mental health facilities in the community, and one, the Friendship Club, meets in a board and care. Another, Old Towne, meets in Centennial Place (low income housing). The Socialites Club meets in Pacific Clinics; Colorado Rockies and Ingerayin Agump meet at Arden House (part of Verdugo Mental Health); Positive Directions and Grupo Nuevo meet at Arcadia Mental Health; Looney Tunes meets at La Puente Mental Health.

Regional events are planned monthly and recently have included a barbecue at Santa Fe Dam, a trip to Santa Monica Pier for volleyball, and the annual Halloween party.

The size of this region presents us with a challenge and has become a focus for recent outreach efforts. The consumers want us to start more clubs, and their numbers have grown in recent years. Project Return: The Next Step is committed to providing consumers in the San Gabriel Valley Region with opportunities to get involved in our clubs and other activities in the community.

SOUTH BAY REGION
Emy Singson, Regional Aide

Club Aides: John Paul, Brian Hammond, Leela Murthy, Kathleen McCain, Gordon Abernethy, Edward Henry, Ruben Garcia, Brent Popham

Clubs: The Club!, JUMP! Club, Club Our Way, Happy Harbor Club, Stepping Stones, La Perla, Crossroads, T.G.I.F. Club, Double Timers Club

Summary

At present in the South Bay Region we have ten clubs. Hopefully, by the end of 2002 I will be able to open four more clubs. This includes the Russian Club, which adds to our ethnic diversity.

Part of my job as Regional Aide for the South Bay Region is to advocate for individuals who have a diagnosis of mental illness, so as to help them gain as much independence in the community where they live as possible, in order to improve their quality of life.

One of the best things I have done so far in my region is to do seminars about the importance of getting back to work or school, or of doing volunteer work in the community. I help PR:TNS members understand how SSI benefits work and what incentives are available for SSI recipients who want to become self-sufficient.

I visit my clubs on a regular basis and encourage consumers I meet in the community to join a PR:TNS club. The Club! meets at Coastal Asian Pacific Mental Health; Club Our Way meets at South Bay Mental Health; Crossroads meets at Didi Hirsch MHC, and the T.G.I.F. Club meets at San Pedro Mental Health Services. JUMP! Club and the Happy Harbor Club meet at board and cares (Olivia Isabel Manor Guest Home and Harbor View House). Stepping Stones meets at Enrichment Through Employment and the Double Timers Club meets at the South Bay Department of Rehabilitation. La Perla meets at Harbor UCLA Hospital.

Regional events are planned monthly and recently have included such diverse activities as a session with a hair stylist and a power boat ride. We also celebrate holidays with parties and picnics.

SOUTHEAST REGION
Treneise Roberson, Regional Aide

Club Aides: Nicolas Cruz, Charles Endsley, Barbara Russaw, Christopher Walker

Clubs: Crossroads Cougars, New Goals, Lynwood Production Club, Together We Achieve, Golden Eagles, 4-Aces, Winners Circle, Burning Spears Club

Summary

The goals in the Southeast Region include opening a Schizophrenics Anonymous club, as well as a club for the blind, a club for those who speak sign language, and one for people who speak Spanish. I have also been advocating for a Discovery Center to be opened in this region.

There is an Outreach Specialist in PR:TNS. His name is Jose Flores, and he has been very helpful in assisting me and the club aides in connecting with consumers and inviting them to our clubs.

Three of our clubs, Together We Achieve, 4 Aces, and Golden Eagles, meet at board and cares. The Cougars Club meets at an independent living facility (Crossroads Village), and two of our clubs, New Goals and Lynwood Productions, meet at community centers. Winners Circle Club meets at the Augusta Hawkins Mental Health Center, and the Burning Spears Club meets at West Central Family Mental Health Services.

Regional events and travel outings are planned every month, and we regularly meet for a picnic at a local park, where we also celebrate members' birthdays. We encourage members to participate in the events sponsored by PR:TNS on a countywide level, and many of our members attend the baseball games and theater outings. We also have members who have gone on the trips to Big Bear and beyond.

Project Return is committed to providing consumers of all regions and all walks of life with opportunities. We believe in equal rights for mental health consumers, and in the Southeast Region we are committed to aiding in the recovery of our members through involving them in regular opportunities for socialization and self-help.

WESTSIDE REGION
Drew Zamir, Regional Aide

Club Aides: Janet Zarate, Fred Lee, Sue Whitehead, Raul Villarreal, Kevin Hernandez, Mark Karmatz, Mark Allen, Eleanor Alpert, Ophelia Portillo

Clubs: Musicales Club, Up's and Down's 2, Santa Monica Friends, Dual Diagnosis Peer Support, Edelman's Club, Star Club, The Manorites, Bel Aire Club, Beverly Club, Golden Goodies, Performance Workshop

Summary:

There are eleven clubs in the Westside Region. Five of them meet in board and cares: Musicales (Villa Stanley West); The Manorites (The Manor); Golden Goodies (Golden Manor); Bel Aire Club (Bel Aire Guest Home), and Star Club (Villa Stanley). Three of the clubs meet at Step Up on Second: Santa Monica Friends, Up's and Down's 2, and Performance Workshop. The Beverly Club meets at an independent living facility, the Alcott Center, and two clubs, Edelman's Club and Dual Diagnosis Peer Support, meet at Edelman Westside Mental Health Clinic.

I visit most of the clubs weekly, and all of the clubs at least twice a month. I participate where appropriate and provide technical support to the club aides as needed. For example, at Step Up On Second the Performance Workshop focuses on music, and at my last visit the club aide was encouraging the members to play along with a simple rhythm on drum and guitar. Then we had a lesson in music theory about the whole note, the half note, the quarter note, and finally the eighth note. This is a way of socializing that also engages people in a common interest that stimulates concentration. We then had a session where we played music with the skills we learned. Some of the members are accomplished musicians, and they practice to improve their performance levels, and this provides further music for the group to listen to.

Another club in my region is the Golden Goodies, which meets in a board and care. The club aide starts the meeting by asking members to report on the highs and lows of their week, and we listen respectfully to one another and encourage each other to confront our problems assertively. After we finish the sharing, we have table games with prizes, and then we have snacks. This is a club that balances self-help and socialization in a way the members find helpful.

All of the clubs in my region have found their own ways to meet the needs of the members. Together we support one another in our journeys toward recovery.

INTRODUCTIONS TO THE DISCOVERY CENTERS

THE ANTELOPE VALLEY DISCOVERY CENTER
William Slocum, Program Coordinator

The Antelope Valley Discovery Center opened in November of 2000 on the site of the Mental Health Association's Palmdale Social Center. The new Discovery Center differed from the Social Center in that all of the staff were consumers. Only one person had ever worked in the mental health field before.

The Center started attracting members immediately, some of whom were "inherited" from the old social center. Some of these members began to take more active roles than they had in the past. Several members took on jobs as club aides. Other members volunteered or led groups on a one-time basis. The member-staff helped the new facilitators with their new jobs as well as led groups of their own.

Since that time the number of Project Return clubs in the Antelope Valley has increased to eleven. Many of the people who were club aides or volunteers have gone on to become regional aides and program assistants. This sharing of the responsibility for running the center is part of what the Discovery Center is all about. More and more members have taken an active role in their own recovery as a result.

When we started, fifteen to twenty-five members would attend the center each weekday. Currently, twenty-five to thirty-five members attend. In addition to the original clubs, two new clubs have been added. One is an acoustical music group for people who want to play a musical instrument and sing songs of their own choosing. Another is a club for Hispanic members named by its members Grupo Nueva Esperanza (Group of New Hope). It offers activities in Spanish as well as English language instruction videos. Every week there is a craft class which is run by members and member staff. The same is true for a computer class. The A.V. Discovery Center has three state of the art computers with Internet access for members as well as a computer for the member-staff. Recovery, Inc. holds a weekly meeting at the center where members learn to apply methods of self-help to the problems of daily living.

Any description of the Discovery Center's activities would not be complete without a description of its outings program. Members meet each week to plan future outings as well as review outings they have already planned. In response to members' expressed wishes, groups have gone to places all over southern California, including but not limited to Disneyland, Sea World, and Magic Mountain, as well as to many festivals, hikes, picnics, and plays.

The sharing of the responsibility for the operation of the Center among many members has helped create a sense of community. The Antelope Valley Discovery Center is a place where members can experience friendship without experiencing stigma. Members helping members works!

LONG BEACH DISCOVERY CENTER
Gail Green, Program Coordinator

The Long Beach Discovery Center was started in 1997. We rented a small space in the basement of the Village ISA. Staff consisted of myself and one other half-time person. AMI and others in the community donated furniture, books, and a TV. We offered a Wednesday dinner for members at a cost of two dollars. At the dinner we publicized PRTNS activities and after dinner played games.

The second year of operation, we grew, and I added two more staff who were consumers who worked ten hours a week, and we expanded our operation to seven days a week. We open from noon to eight p.m. on weekdays and from nine to five p.m. on weekends.

In the fourth year we had to move to a larger location in Merit Hall in Long Beach. Now I have two full-time staff and two half-time staff, and we serve approximately 25 people on average each day. (The room we rent is only able to accommodate 25.) Our Wednesday dinner at the Village often attracts 25 – 30 additional people, and our outings in the community attract 50 – 70 people.

The Discovery Center is focused on recovery and is open 365 days a year. It provides a place for people with mental illness to go where they are welcome and wanted.

Listening to the members is the most important part of the Discovery Center. For example, members request help with such varied items as Renters' Rebate Forms and resumes. We advocate for our members at times, but even more importantly, we support our members' efforts to advocate for themselves.

Besides the eight PRTNS clubs which meet at the Center we offer a variety of self-help groups and meetings. On Mondays we have an Up's and Down's group; on Tuesday we offer an Internet Workshop and a Schizophrenics Anonymous group. On Wednesdays there is our Women's group, and on Thursday there is a cooking class, a writing class, and a relationship-building group. On Friday we have a Men's group and a Smoke Free group. On Saturdays, besides our outings, we offer Emotions Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous groups. On Sundays we have a coffee and doughnut circle and show current movies.

Our most recent club is Computer Geeks, a club for members who want to use computers, learn more about the internet, and have fun e-mailing friends. Like all our groups and clubs, Computer Geeks was started at the request of our members. The Discovery Center is in existence to serve the members; its purpose is to encourage people with a diagnosis of mental illness to move beyond that diagnosis and reclaim their sense of self.

INTRODUCTIONS TO THE SPECIAL PROGRAMS

ADVANCE HEALTH CARE DIRECTIVES AND "HELPING FRIENDS"

Catherine Bond, Training Coordinator

In 1999, California passed legislation making Psychiatric Advance Health Care Directives legal. In 2000, Protection and Advocacy, Inc. developed a form for use in California for Advance Directives. In 2001, Project Return: The Next Step began a program for training mental health consumers in how best to complete this form.

As of this date, PR:TNS has successfully trained nearly three hundred people---consumers, family members, and professionals---in the process of filling out an Advance Health Care Directive. There are two parts to this form: 1) appointing a health care agent, and 2) individual health care instructions. The workshop designed by PR:TNS covers both parts and gives people enough background information to enable them to complete the form on their own. The workshop is available in both English and Spanish, and the materials have been translated into Spanish. In addition, Catherine Bond is available to work with people one-on-one if they wish to fill out their Advance Directive without attending a workshop.

A partial list of agencies and organizations that have sponsored trainings in Advance Directives is as follows:

- Victory Club House (Van Nuys)
- Hollywood Mental Health (Los Angeles)
- Coastal Asian Pacific Mental Health (Gardena)
- West Valley Mental Health (Canoga Park)
- San Fernando Mission Mental Health (Granada Hills)
- Office of Consumer Affairs (Los Angeles)
- Pacific Clinics (Pasadena)
- The Village (Long Beach)
- Patients' Rights Bureau (Los Angeles)
- Edelman Clinic (West Los Angeles)

Along with the project of training mental health consumers in how to complete an Advance Directive is a pilot project in training people in how to become effective health care agents. The focus is on ways in which an agent can advocate responsibly and respectfully. In 2002 a six-week course was offered at the Village in Long Beach, and in 2003 a similar course is planned for members of the Los Angeles county branches of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

"Helping Friends" also provides consumers with a safe place to store a copy of their completed Advance Directives and with advice on how best to present their Advance Directive to their health care providers.

COUNTYWIDE CLIENT ACTIVITY FUND

Elaine Des Roches, Administrator

The Countywide Client Activity Fund (CCAF) involves the process of identifying and paying consumers a reimbursement for attending county mental health planning committees.

The Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) gives people application packets, conducts Orientation and Networking training sessions, notifies consumers of their acceptance for reimbursement, and verifies attendance records for reimbursements.

The Mental Health Association (MHA) collects applications and creates files, and "fronts" the money for the checks when requirements are completed. MHA also makes detailed monthly reports to Ron Schraiber at OCA with the names of consumers who are getting reimbursements from CCAF, the amounts they are receiving, and the meetings for which they are receiving reimbursements. I am the administrative person who performs these duties for the MHA as part of my job responsibilities at Project Return: The Next Step.

I am co-chair of the CCAF committee, and as such I tape all meetings and help define Committee guidelines (all members can vote). I also keep written copies of all motions. The CCAF committee, composed of members from the Office of Consumer Affairs, the Mental Health Association (PRTNS) and the Los Angeles County Client Coalition, discusses all applications for funds.

Last fiscal year the fund was \$50,000. This year the fund is assumed to be \$25,000 unless we hear about more funds becoming available. The fund sets aside 70% of the money for reimbursing consumers' attendance at county planning committees. 18% is set aside for MHA to reimburse administrative costs, and the remainder is undesignated funds for conferences, travel, and trainings.

From January, when the funds became available, to June 2002, the following amounts were spent: \$11,649.86 to reimburse clients for attending meetings; \$9,000.00 to the MHA for administering the program, and \$3,137.22 for undesignated funds. The total amount spent in fiscal year 2001-2002 was \$23,787.08. The following is a breakdown of expenditures for the first three months of the fiscal year 2002-2003: \$3,375.00 for consumers attending county planning meetings; \$2,250.00 to MHA for administering the program, and \$121.41 in undesignated funds. The total amount spent so far is \$5,796.41.

Most meetings openly welcome consumer participation. Only a few openly resent our presence. This is a very positive program from the Department of Mental Health, a "stigma buster" of the best kind!

THE FRIENDSHIP LINE
Lynnette Peraza, Friendship Line Coordinator

The Friendship Line is a telephone help line that is designed to offer peer support to anyone who calls. Since its opening in November of 1999, the Friendship Line has become the most successful "warm line" in Los Angeles County and has been hailed as the finest service of its kind in California.

Every evening, the Friendship Line provides a "listening ear" to approximately 30 callers. Every year, the Friendship Line answers approximately 10,200 calls. The focus of these calls ranges from a desire to talk about the day's events to a call for help when someone is feeling depressed or suicidal. (The Friendship Line has the capacity to initiate a three-way conversation with a "hot line" in the event of an emergency call preceding a suicide attempt.)

What makes this line unique is that it is supervised and operated by mental health consumers, individuals who know first hand how it feels to live and deal with mental illness. They are survivors of their condition who have felt the stigma that often occurs with a mental health diagnosis that can make functioning in society difficult.

The Friendship Line is open seven nights a week, including holidays. The hours of operation are from 6 to 10 p.m., times when people say they need our services the most. These are the hours before bedtime when most mental

health facilities are closed. When someone has a mental illness, such as depression, the nights can seem like an eternity. As one of our callers expressed this: "Knowing that you're there is a real comfort. There are times when I'm not in crisis, but I can feel myself beginning to get stressed out. I can call you, and you help me calm down. And there have been times I have been in crisis and called you, and you helped me connect with the crisis line. Thank you!"

The Friendship Line also provides empathetic listeners to those who are lonely and/or isolated. We encourage callers to become more active in their communities, and we offer many referrals regarding social activities (as well as information about housing, food, and many other services available in Los Angeles county.) We believe that by staying socially active people can greatly lessen their chances of needing to be hospitalized.

The Friendship Line also offers reassurance. We can speak from our own experience, and we can share ways to endure. In this way our peer supporters become mentors and role models for recovery. We have found that callers often learn to become better self-advocates by first experiencing the advocacy efforts of the peer supporters on the Friendship Line.

GIFTS FOR GIVING

Denise Cate, Program Assistant

For twenty years the Mental Health Association in Los Angeles County collected presents from businesses and community residents for men and women with mental illness who were members of Project Return clubs. Today, Project Return: The Next Step leads the Gifts for Giving project. We host twelve parties across the county to give people with mental illness the opportunity to participate in holiday traditions. This program is funded by donations, some in cash and some in gift items.

In the fall many volunteers start making phone calls to businesses asking them to donate whatever they can, from clothes, to grooming items to toys. Last year we contacted more than 250 businesses, and received more than 200 donations.

With the cash donations that we receive, PR:TNS staff go shopping. We cover the downtown area looking for bargains. Our budget is about \$3.00 per gift. Everything we buy is brand new. We are able to find art supplies, bedding, paperback books and board games, clothing items, grooming products, and costume jewelry, among many other items. Last year, between donations and shopping we were able to provide about 2,500 gifts.

The gifts are distributed at twelve parties in the ten days preceding Christmas. Anyone who is a mental health consumer can attend and can bring family members. The purpose of the Gifts for Giving campaign is to provide gifts to consumers for themselves or for someone they love.

We assemble the gifts at the Project Return office, and then we group the items in plastic bags for distribution at each of the parties that we host. The first time I helped host a party we had all the gifts out on the table, and a lady came up to me and asked if she could pick out a gift. She told me that she and her husband had five children. They had been able to get together a few Christmas presents for them, but she didn't have anything for her husband. I helped her pick out a sweater for her husband, and after I wrapped it and gave it to her, she started to cry. She told me that this was going to be the happiest Christmas ever because she was able to give a gift to everyone she loved the most.

No matter how tired I get preparing and actually doing the parties, my spirit never tires out. I know this is true for my coworkers as well, because everyone participates by helping out with the parties in their regions. Gifts for Giving is one of the most rewarding events sponsored by Project Return: The Next Step.

NEXT STEP NEWS
Gaines Lyons, Editor

Next Step News is the newsletter of Project Return: The Next Step. The newsletter is produced by Gaines Lyons, Editor, and Elaine Des Roches, layout specialist.

The newsletter is published quarterly in eight pages. *Next Step News* has a circulation of approximately 3,200. Most subscribers are consumers. But the newsletter is also mailed to mental health professionals, social workers, and family members. Copies of the newsletter are also sent to Japan and translated for the benefit of consumers affiliated with the PRTNS exchange.

The logo on the masthead of *Next Step News* says "Providing Hope, Encouragement, and Useful Information." This motto is meant to serve as a guideline for composing each issue of the newsletter as well as a standard against which to measure the success of our efforts. Having a motto endows the newsletter with a sense of purpose and direction.

The newsletter features consumer poems, biographies, short stories, reports on field trips, important announcements, editorials, consumer advocacy, reports on mental health legislation, trainings, and conferences. We entertain occasional submissions from non-consumers, like Richard Van Horn, Executive Director of MHA/LA.

Next Step News is the networking nerve center of Project Return: The Next Step. It inspires hope by featuring positive role models of recovery, gainful employment, and independent living in the community. It also informs members about issues relevant to consumers, such as insurance parity for mental health, and coercive psychiatry. It conveys information consumers can use, like transportation options, warnings about adverse side effects of certain anti-psychotics, scholarships to conferences, and utilizing the healing potential of art in consumer Art Fairs.

Producing a newsletter worthy of respect greatly reduces stigma by debunking the many myths and absurd misconceptions that members of the public have regarding people with mental illness.

OUTREACH
Jose Flores, Outreach Specialist

As Outreach Specialist, I am responsible for the development of new clubs throughout the county for Project Return: The Next Step. My special focus is on clubs for mental health consumers who are Spanish speakers.

A partial list of clubs that have emerged in the past year:

Grupo Nueva Esperanza (Antelope Valley Discovery Center)
Latinos Unidos (Downtown/Mid Wilshire Region)
Unidos en el Bienestar (East Los Angeles/Northeast Region)
Match Club (Downtown/Mid Wilshire Region)

I also help redevelop clubs that have experienced a slump in membership. For example, the Jonathan Diamond Club in East Los Angeles lost membership after many people moved out of the board and care where the meetings were held (Centro Maravilla). I assisted the club aide and the regional aide to reach out to people in mental health agencies in the surrounding area to generate referrals to the club. The existing members did not want the club to end, but they did not know how to go about attracting new members. We generated interest in the club in the surrounding community, and now the Jonathan Diamond Club is experiencing new growth in membership.

Another club, the Overcomers, which meets at San Fernando Mental Health, needed restructuring after the club aide moved on. I encouraged the new club aide to start a vigorous campaign within the agency to seek referrals from staff. We introduced new board games and creative fundraisers to subsidize luncheons and trips. With members' help, we turned what could have been a sad story into a success story.

Not all outreach efforts end in the revival of a club, however. Sometimes the outreach serves to uncover the fact that a club has outlived its usefulness. One example of this is the club that used to meet at Canoga Park Mental Health. Even after our best efforts, attendance was low, and we finally decided to close the club. This decision freed up PR:TNS resources for other efforts in other locations. In this way, I see my job as helping determine where are the best locations for clubs and how best to utilize our staff and budget.

On a personal level, I have made many contacts and met many people I would not otherwise have met. This has contributed to my sense of value within Project Return: The Next Step. I do informal networking for the organization every day, and I spread the word about the work of PR:TNS everywhere I go.

PRTNS' JAPANESE AMERICAN CONSUMER EXCHANGE
Bill Compton, Director

Mitchy Akiyoshi, an MHA/LA consultant, acting on an invitation from Yadokari No Sato, a mental health facility not unlike the Village, started PRTNS' Japanese American Consumer Exchange in 1996. Since that time twenty-nine PRTNS members have had the opportunity to visit Japan, and twenty Japanese consumers have visited PRTNS. This exchange has been solely sponsored by the Mitchy Fund, which is composed of private donations, including some very large donations from Janssen Japan.

These annual trips have been very informative for the PRTNS participants, who have toured mental health facilities all over Japan. They have also made panel presentations to groups of both Japanese professionals and consumers, speaking about PRTNS and giving their personal stories of recovery. In 2000 they were special guests of Zenseiran, the national Japanese consumer organization at their national conference in Okinawa, and they also visited the Pacific Rim Regional Conference of the World Federation of Mental Health where PRTNS director Bill Compton made a presentation. This year they participated in a dialogue with their Japanese counterparts on their respective mental health systems which was held at the Japanese Parliament.

The groups of Japanese consumers who have visited the United States have participated in PRTNS activities, stayed with PRTNS members, and have made panel presentations throughout the county. In 1998 they were special guests at the Alternatives Conference sponsored by PRTNS.

From this exchange many friendships have developed, most notably the one between Bill Compton and Ken Udagawa, who first came as a participant in 1997 and now is the Japanese coordinator of the exchange. Next year Bill and Ken are planning a presentation on the exchange for the Biennial Conference of the World Federation of Mental Health in Melbourne, Australia, a presentation that will be funded by the Mitchy Fund.

Members' Comments

"The Japanese-American Exchange has taught me that the consumer advocacy movement is truly global. I have learned from my Japanese counterparts that our common experiences truly outweigh our cultural differences." – Gaines Lyons

"My trip to Japan was different from any other trip that I have taken. Our hosts were so nice to me that my self-esteem went sky high. I didn't want to come home!" – Stephen Rivera

SPECIAL EVENTS
Gustavo Rodriguez, Associate Director

We believe that socialization plays an essential part in recovery and adds much to one's quality of life. Project Return: The Next Step believes that when people are treated with respect, as responsible adults, they usually respond favorably and are capable of much more than providers sometimes think they are.

As a result, PR:TNS plans outings and trips that are similar in scope to any one would find through a travel agent. Going on these trips for some of our members means connecting with others for the first time in many years. The results can be amazing.

In 2002, the major PR:TNS trips were as follows:

2/7 – 2/10	Red Rock Canyon (camping)	30 people
3/6 – 3/8	Ensenada, Mexico	50
4/13	PR:TNS Awards Picnic	250
5/7 – 5/9	Lake Perris (camping)	20
6/19	Hurricane Harbor (water park)	42
7/15	Orange County Fair	100
7/17 – 7/19	San Felipe, Rosarito, Ensenada, Tijuana	54
8/19	Countywide UNO Tournament	28
9/9 – 9/13	Big Bear (cabin camping)	92
9/23 – 9/25	Leo Carillo (camping)	16
10/10	Tijuana	18
10/23	Disneyland	40

We also had free USC baseball and volleyball tickets, as well as tickets to theater productions at low cost. There were beach outings throughout the summer, and each region also sponsors a regional activity each month (barbecues, holiday parties, dances, etc.).

Future trips include a visit to Zion National Park and Las Vegas (November 4 – 6) and a four-day trip to San Francisco in February of 2003.

Project Return does not subsidize any of these trips. The cost is covered completely by the consumers who attend. However, no trip is planned unless PR:TNS is sure that the price is as reasonable as possible. All trips happen as a result of consumer interest and consumer input.

An unexpected benefit of going on trips is that many of our members have met their "special someone" while traveling with PR:TNS!