Creative Expressions
At the Men’s Residential Center

One of the classes at our Men’s Residential Center (MRC) is Creative Expressions. Held every Thursday, the class gives the men a space to engage in creativity, no matter their experience or skill level. Providing a therapeutic element as well as a way for the men to express themselves, the art projects range from making paper flowers to painting planter pots to baking.

With the arrival of COVID-19 the arts have taken on a new role at MRC: a way for clients to pass the time. Artistic activities have increased in number and type since the Stay at Home order was put in place. Now, in addition to the weekly Creative Expressions class there is a baking class where goodies are made for everyone to enjoy. On Cinco de Mayo the class learned how to make tamales.

Beyond the scheduled classes, there have been opportunities for the men to work on projects during their recreation time. A card-making station was built in the dining room to encourage everyone to stay in touch with family and friends. The men held a paper airplane competition — the planes were judged based on visual appeal, speed, and even aerodynamics.

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From the President and CEO, Kay D. Toran

As we near the end of our fiscal year in June we have the opportunity to reflect on our work over the past year. Our focus at VOA Oregon is to determine our community’s needs and develop services to meet those needs. The foundation of these services is built around providing a trauma-informed, evidence-based, and holistic approach with therapeutic activities. Through our broad-based delivery of social services, we continue to impact lives in a positive way and make major contributions to the well-being of our community.

This year we have already served over 12,000 members of our community, providing safe environments to receive treatment, overcome barriers, and make healthy decisions. Each program has an immense passion for serving their participants and helping them succeed. We are excited to share with you our new Community Impact report, which shows all the great work that our staff at VOA Oregon has accomplished over the past year. To view and read, please visit: www.voaor.org/community-impact.

The current environment in which we are delivering services is one of the most challenging we have ever encountered here at VOA Oregon. The impact of COVID-19 is affecting not only our daily lives, but also the lives of our children, youth, and families.

During this time, we have asked our staff to change how they deliver services and the environment they work in to ensure that our clients continue to receive important and often critical services. The staff’s willingness to make these changes has been deeply appreciated.

Even during these challenges, VOA Oregon will continue our dedication to serving the most vulnerable, the abused, and those in need of a second chance. We look forward to further sharing our stories and impact as we continue to navigate these trying times.

And during this critical time be well and be safe. It will be as a community that we move forward to defeat this health crisis and win together. As always, thank you for your support.

Kay Toran

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My Little Waiting Room Turns 10

It’s hard to believe that My Little Waiting Room (MLWR) first opened at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center 10 years ago and since then we have also opened an additional site at Providence Portland Medical Center. We continue to see consistent numbers with returning families using MLWR. Program Director, Crystal Ross, who started her career with VOA Oregon at MLWR in 2011, recalls seeing some of the same families she first met eight years ago still bringing their children to MLWR today. Thank you to the MLWR staff who continue to carry on the mission of creating an environment where children thrive while families heal.

CourtCare Gratitude

CourtCare often has parents who show gratitude for the program, but one parent expressed her gratitude in a big way. Stephanie has two grown sons about to leave the house and embark on a new journey as adults. When the boys were 3 and 4 years old, they were living in Portland and going through a very difficult time. Stephanie juggled several court dates, at risk of losing custody of her boys and unsure of what the future held for her family. She stumbled upon CourtCare while attending her court appearances. This was an instant relief that child care was available and one less thing she had to worry about. Stephanie dropped her boys off at CourtCare and met two teachers who the boys immediately formed a bond with. This helped Stephanie feel even better about having to go to the courthouse so often.

Fast forward to January 2020, Stephanie drove 5 hours from her home in Washington State with a purpose. Unsure if CourtCare was still in existence, she was so happy to find the program in the same room she remembered. She also received another pleasant surprise, the two teachers who welcomed her sons with open arms over 15 years ago were still there. Giving them both hugs, she thanked them for caring for her boys during the most challenging time in her life and let them know that CourtCare was there for her family when she needed it the most. Her sons were also featured on the very first brochure for CourtCare and she requested a copy to include in a scrapbook she was putting together for them when they move out of the house.

Stephanie became a foster parent shortly after gaining full custody of her sons. She has a heart for caring for children who are facing challenging situations like her family once did. It is stories like this one that resonate with the mission and purpose of CourtCare. We work to provide support and care for children who do not need to see the inside of a court room, but instead have a safe and compassionate space to be themselves.

*The mother’s name has been changed in this story for confidentiality purposes.*
Helping Our Heroes
Contributor: Christina Anderson

This week we would like to highlight the phenomenal staff at Volunteers of America Oregon Outpatient Services. The outpatient clinic serves men and women who are justice-involved, pre-release individuals attempting to overcome incarceration; and post-prison individuals returning to the community after incarceration. The challenge to engage this population has continued to change daily throughout the pandemic, and the staff has had to find new and creative ways to work with clients. The recovery mentors outreach team has been in the community providing food boxes, in-person support to sign up for technology (such as LifeLine phone applications), bus passes, or daily engagement contacts to those living houseless in the community. The clinical and admission staff have converted individual offices to drop-in rooms to allow those participants who are unable to engage in telehealth care a safe space to receive services.

One of the biggest challenges the participants face is social isolation and struggling with the disruption of their daily routines. The staff has really stepped up in this time of need, providing support to their colleagues and participants alike. They are making daily phone calls to those who are quarantined at home; compiling care packages for the participants; picking up open shifts; and stepping in to provide in-person services.

A heartfelt THANK YOU to the staff of the Volunteers of America Oregon Outpatient Services for their important work!

How Can You Help?

Sending cards of encouragement to staff:
Cards can be sent to: Volunteers of America Oregon, Attention: Christina Anderson, 10564 SE Washington Street, Portland, OR 97216.

Prayers of strength, comfort, and support.

Donation of care package items.
Items for care packages (such as bottled water, Gatorade, granola bars, bags of chips/snacks, etc.) are welcomed and can be sent to Volunteers of America Oregon, Attention: Christina Anderson, 10564 SE Washington Street, Portland, OR 97216.

Monetary donations for care packages.
Please send checks payable to Volunteers of America Oregon, memo line Outpatient Services, mailed to: Volunteers of America Oregon, Attention: Kay Toran, 3910 S.E. Stark Street, Portland, Oregon 97214. Donations may also be made online at www.voaor.org/donate.
The After-School Kid
With Zach Sippel

I wish more people knew the value and impact of these programs.
- Zach Sippel

Zach is a self-proclaimed “after-school kid.” Growing up in the Twin Cities, Zach and his sister attended an after-school program at the local Jewish Community Center. “I learned a lot of really valuable lessons about community, faith, inclusion, values, and expressing myself in art and activity.” When he became an adult, Zach continued to stay involved in the program by becoming a leader and teaching classes there for 10 years.

Five years ago, Zach moved to the Pacific Northwest and found he was missing this connection with an after-school program. Knowing that he wanted to focus on youth development and academic tutoring, he began a search that led him to VOA Oregon’s Prevention Services. Zach serves as a Volunteer Activities Coordinator at one of our after-school program sites. “I was surprised by how quickly I felt like a part of the community. I am really, really thankful for that.”

In the summer of 2018, the site received a grant through Big City Mountaineers for the youth to go on a hiking trip. This would take them out of the city – and out of their comfort zones. “It can be really intimidating for city kids, even for me, to get out into the wilderness for an extended period of time.” The VOA Oregon team worked hard talking to the young people and encouraging them to go on the trip. At first it took a while to get the participants comfortable, but the deeper they went into nature, the more they relaxed and had fun. “To this day it is one of my favorite experiences with those kids. We had a blast.”

For Zach, his commitment, dedication, and service to the program are of great importance to him. “Providing a mentor and a safe space after school for young people at an early age makes a huge impact. Even for just one kid at the site.” There are many social challenges youth face today, such as mental health obstacles and addiction. With more programs like Prevention Services, “we could alleviate a lot of challenges facing our society.”

This opportunity to serve the youth in our community is often Zach’s favorite part of the week. He gains as much from the youth as they do from him. The young people show him a different perspective, allowing him to look at life outside of the box. “I think it’s important for adults to remember to be playful, to be curious, and to be creative. Speaking selfishly, those kids brighten my week!”

Learn more about our Prevention Services at www.voaor.org/prevention-services/.
Investing in VOA Oregon

With Crystal Ross

“Investing my time and energy into this field of social services I feel is a huge accomplishment.”

- Crystal Ross

Crystal began her career with VOA Oregon at the My Little Waiting Room (MLWR) drop-in child care center at Providence St. Vincent. The drop-in model originally drew her to the program. “I wish the community would recognize what an incredible model it is and see the need for creating similar programs. There should be child care available in every doctor’s office and courthouse. Children deserve a safe environment while their parents can focus on their own appointments.” Crystal also found that being a part of VOA Oregon means being community-service driven. As she got to know the organization, she learned more about the number of programs and services offered to the community we serve.

After a few years at MLWR, an opportunity opened at the Family Relief Nursery (FRN). For Crystal, this brought about a chance to continue her professional growth at VOA Oregon. “Leaving the organization was not something that I considered; instead I focused on what I could do within the agency to sustain my career.” The FRN program isn’t traditional child care; it is a child abuse prevention program focused on reducing the number of children in foster care. The program uses a holistic and strengths-based approach to serve the whole family through therapeutic classrooms for children, case management, parenting support, and community resources and referrals. “We are meeting families where they are, depending on what their individual needs are. Everybody comes with something different.”

In her time at VOA Oregon, Crystal has found joy and challenges in her work. “It’s the relationships with others that makes this experience so memorable to me. There is something to be said about not just creating but maintaining relationships with other people.” These relationships have come through VOA Oregon staff members, families at FRN, MLWR, and other drop-in programs. The biggest challenge Crystal faces is not being able to meet everyone’s needs, “especially during challenging times like this, clients are more heightened, they have more needs, they have less resources.”

Now as the Program Director for both the Family Relief Nursery and Drop-In Child Care programs, Crystal is a positive leader moving these programs forward. When asked what one thing she is learning right now, she shared three: patience, gratitude, and accepting uncertainty. She continues to encourage her team to patiently sit in times of uncertainty, and to be okay with doing so. “It’s something especially in social services that we need to be able to model for our families, for the people that we serve, and for one another.”

Learn more about our Family Relief Nursery at www.voaor.org/family-relief-nursery/.
Learn more about our Drop-in Child Care programs at www.voaor.org/drop-in-child-care/.
Working Together

Our Moving Forward program at Outpatient Services works in partnership with the Department of Community Justice to serve participants in the Multnomah County Justice Reinvestment Program (MCJRP). The program provides them with substance abuse and mental health treatment, medication-supported recovery, peer mentorship, and ongoing recovery support. As COVID-19 came to our community, our team has had to work to find new ways to continue to serve this community while being sure to make safety a top priority for all. To show their appreciation, our partners at MCJRP came together to share a message to all the teams out there powering through this challenge in order to continue serving the members of our community in need.

You can watch the video on our YouTube Channel, under the playlist titled VOA Oregon Partners.

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Creative Expressions
At the Men’s Residential Center

One of their bigger projects allowed the men to be creative, have fun, and spread love to the community all at the same time. Taking their artwork to a larger scale, they made window art, encouraging, and inspiring everyone in their community who saw the beautiful windows.

Art has become not just a part of their program curriculum, but also a way to relax during these uncertain and scary times, proving that creativity comes in many forms and that art really is for everyone.

Learn more about our Men’s Residential Center at www.voaor.org/mens-residential-treatment/.

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