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***Improving the Marrow of Mental Health Services:
Local Non-profits Partner for Excellence with SLOCCF Grant***

San Luis Obispo, CA óIf leading edge non-profit collaboration and partnership sets the standard of excellence for innovative programming in the non-profit sector, then Community Counseling Center of San Luis Obispo County (CCC) and Transitions-Mental Health Association (TMHA) are bringing ingredients of best practice to the local community.

Funded by a San Luis Obispo County Community Foundation Preventive Health Grant, CCC is breaking new ground by embedding therapists at TMHA Wellness Centers in Arroyo Grande and San Luis Obispo. Given the name *Lift Now*, the primary goal of the pilot project is to provide counseling and therapy to individuals living with a severe and chronic mental illness. *Lift Now* is rooted in the treatment philosophy of recovery and is designed to provide a de-stigmatizing, stabilizing resource for TMHA clients who may also be participating in socialization, supportive employment, peer to peer, case management, and housing programs.

An anonymous Wellness Center client reported: "I am glad the CCC is offering this type of counseling. I see the opportunity as a step towards mental wellness and greater independence for myself and others."

Another aim of the project is to link TMHA's Wellness Center members with leadership opportunities and avenues to experience a sense of connectedness to community.

The first venture designed to foster the community building process is a group workday on Saturday, January 21, 2012. Scheduled from 11:00am to 2:00pm, CCC therapists and Wellness Center members will work side-by-side to beautify the outdoor and indoor spaces at the CCC main office located at 1129 Marsh Street in downtown San Luis Obispo. Participants will install plants from the Growing Grounds Farm nursery (TMHA program), paint a therapy room, and help plan next steps to improve the therapeutic qualities of the CCC facility. CCC and TMHA will also be joined by youth from Atascadero High School's Wellness Center, an innovation project in its first year funded by the Mental Health Services Act and administered by San Luis Obispo County Behavioral Health. "The overarching goal of the Atascadero High School Wellness Center is to expose students to behavioral health education and careers with an emphasis on reducing stigma," said Cami Rouse, Wellness Center Co-Coordinator.

CCC has been serving SLO County since 1968 and is presently host to over 60 volunteer therapists. The agency's mission "to build and support emotionally strong individuals, family, and community through confidential, affordable counseling, advocacy, and education" is now being more fully realized through the *Lift Now* project.

"In terms of innovation, the project is an attempt to alter and re-shape the normative client-therapist relationship," said James Statler, Executive Director of the Community Counseling Center. "By having therapists and consumers share in community service and leadership building

activities, the potential for trust, safety, stigma reduction and the formation of a productive therapeutic alliance is enhanced.ö

öBy supplying a web of evidence based mental health programs, consumer clients stay in recovery longer and build the resiliency to bounce back quicker from psychosis and relapse. There is a common adage that the mental health system is littered with cracks, *Lift Now* is a program that proactively attempts to fill those gaps in a collaborative and innovative manner, creating structural mental health marrow that increases the efficacy of service delivery.ö Statler explained.

Barry Johnson, Division Director for TMHA Rehabilitation and Advocacy Programs stated that the öcollaboration makes a lot sense as it marries two agencies with similar vision and values.ö

A TMHA client wishing to remain anonymous but about to begin the program, reported: "I am looking forward to the counseling so I can work on my communication and start feeling good about myself."

ABOUT CCC

Community Counseling Center is a non-profit, community- based organization staffed by qualified, state-licensed, volunteer therapists or graduate level, supervised interns that has been serving San Luis Obispo County since 1968. The primary purpose is to assist individuals and families to develop the ability to find solutions, makes choices, learn healthy coping skills and initiate changes when life becomes difficult during times of transition, depression, anxiety, trauma, and uncertainty. Their program provides short-term psychological counseling services and psycho-educational information to San Luis Obispo County residents who are uninsured or cannot afford private services. Fees are based on a sliding scale according to each client's ability to pay. Persons who are financially able, through income or insurance coverage, to use private services are offered referrals.

ABOUT TMHA

Transitions-Mental Health Association is a nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating stigma and promoting recovery and wellness for people with mental illness through work, housing, community and family support services. TMHA operates 27 programs at over 35 locations that reach over 2,000 people and 1,500 families in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties. The emphasis of TMHA's many services is to teach vital independent living skills, and build a framework for community re-entry through personal empowerment and hands on experience. For over 30 years, TMHA has been dedicated to providing housing, employment, case management and life-skills support to teens and adults with mental illness; and support, resources and education for their loved ones. For more information, visit www.T-MHA.org.

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