

CalMHSA Program Partner Spotlight

Strategies for a Supportive Environment and Capacity Building United Advocates for Children and Families

With a focus on outreach to underserved groups and innovations that reach Californians across the lifespan, a community approach to mental wellness is central to the success of the Mental Health Services Act. United Advocates for Children and Families (UACF)’s partnership with the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) makes this vision a reality by empowering communities to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness.

For over 20 years, UACF has fostered collaborations and educated communities about important issues involving families and children with mental health challenges to improve the quality of life for all children and youth with mental, emotional, and behavioral challenges. As a conduit to communities, UACF is working to enhance knowledge, understanding, and partnership to expand the reach of CalMHSA’s prevention and early intervention programs.

Understanding Community Needs

UACF’s partnership with county behavioral health departments, community organizations and other stakeholders is supporting community engagement efforts to build awareness that mental health is integral to the community’s well being. In each region, UACF has formed a Network Advisory Committee of community leaders, stakeholders, families, and individuals with lived mental health experience, to work with UACF to identify regional needs and develop a stigma and discrimination reduction plan. Because California is so diverse, any one county has multiple communities that UACF’s stigma and discrimination reduction programs could reach differently. Through a statewide Needs Assessment, UACF identified the unique needs of 12



regions, and then developed a sustainable engagement plan for each. UACF has engaged with Los Angeles, Ventura, San Diego, Merced, San Bernardino/Imperial, Humboldt, Santa Clara, Inyo/Mono, Fresno, Lassen/Modoc, and Orange counties to date.

Local Community Outreach Strategies

Using the information garnered from the Network Advisory Committee and the Needs Assessment, UACF has implemented a host of local community outreach strategies:

Community Roundtables build capacity to connect, support, and empower consumer, families, parents, caregivers, youth and children. UACF’s approach ensures that regardless of background, participants are recognized as equals in their roles and responsibilities in local mental health outreach. The Roundtables also serve as a forum to coordinate a statewide public awareness campaign with CalMHSA and other program partners, as well as engage counties to enhance existing efforts, share best practices and successes. Roundtables have been held in Los Angeles and San Diego, with around 60 participants in each location. The roundtables allow UACF an opportunity to partner with community-based organizations and reach diverse groups to ensure the continuation of effective policies, strategies and practices. Some of the groups reached by UACF’s efforts include underserved ethnic populations, geographically isolated groups, LGBTQ, Native Americans, Veterans and transition age youth.



Behavioral Health Symposium

UACF’s Behavioral Health Symposium, held in San Bernardino on May 28, 2013 helped 200 participants gain an understanding of how widespread mental health challenges are and provided the opportunity to learn about services and recovery programs, gain skills and inspiration to broaden their current knowledge base of mental health issues, and be linked to an array of available community services and resources. Community members, consumers, service providers and county official attended the successful event.

Multi-Cultural Mental Health Education Event

UACF, in partnership with Santa Clara County Mental Health and NAMI Santa Clara, held a multi-cultural event to engage culturally diverse populations targeting people with lived experience, their family members and caregivers in Santa Clara County. The event provided mental health education to approximately 250 family members and individuals whose lives have been affected by mental health challenges, and provided additional multi-cultural mental health education to other organizations that provide mental health services in Santa Clara County.

Tell Your Story Training

UACF’s stigma and discrimination reduction strategies include training and technical assistance with the goal of educating communities and individuals about the causes of mental illness,



available services, and the experiences of those living with mental health issues to counteract stereotypes and prejudice and promote affirming attitudes about people with mental illness. UCAF's Tell Your Story training empowers consumers, families, and youth to tell their stories in a manner that impacts systems change, community response, and neutralizes the stigma and discrimination often associated with mental health challenges.

Tell Your Story Training Impact

UCAF has trained a total of 124 people through their Tell Your Story Training. 44 Certified Trainers who completed the Training for Trainers program have trained 80 people to tell their stories to reduce stigma often associated with mental health challenges.

The Tell Your Story training presents the value and purpose of storytelling, how personal stories can be used to promote responsive change, and how to handle difficult situations. Participants gain tools and resources to assist them in telling their story in a format that is effective, comfortable, and capable of transformation and change within the public mental health system through a two-day train the trainer certified curriculum.

Mental Health First Aid

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) is a groundbreaking public education program that helps the community identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders. In the MHFA course, participants learn risk factors and warning signs for mental health and addiction concerns, strategies for how to help someone in both crisis and non-crisis situations, and where to turn for help.

UCAF tailors MHFA to meet unique community needs. Rural MHFA targets rural communities' unique needs and enhances the communities' capacity around behavioral health issues in rural areas. Youth MHFA introduces participants to the unique risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems in adolescents.

Mental Health First Aid Impact

UCAF will have up to 32 participants in each Mental Health First Aid Instructor trainings in the Superior, Bay Area, Central, Los Angeles, and Southern County Regions, yielding 140-150 certified instructors.

UCAF's numerous stigma and discrimination reduction capacity building efforts serve as a conduit into the counties to enhance their knowledge, understanding, and partnership regarding CaIMHSA's Prevention and Early Intervention efforts, and ongoing annual events and roundtables will go on helping Californians for generations.

For more information on resources or programs from United Advocates for Children and Families, visit <http://www.uacf4hope.org/>, or contact Sireyia Ratliff, Program Director at sratliff@uacf4hope.org or (916) 643-1530 x.102.