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OAK CIRCLE CENTER INTRODUCES TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM

BY ADAM MOORE



Tonja Porter and Marie Robinson

A new program recently put in place on Oak Circle Center is having a remarkable effect on some of the individuals being treated there at Mississippi State Hospital's child and adolescent unit.

The psychiatric services staff members there have implemented a Transitional Living Program that is teaching a variety of skill developments that aid in promoting self-esteem, self-worth, and self-motivation. The ultimate goal is to hand the children and teenagers there the skills and knowledge they need to

direct their lives once they are back at home and in the community.

"Our hope is that the participating patients will recognize levels of self-worth and confidence not experienced in the past," Dr. Barbara Fishgrab said. "They will learn skills that support them in having an independent life. Participation in the program will help alleviate fears of facing the future outside of a hospital setting."

Though similar programs have been in place on the unit before, it

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"OUR HOPE IS THAT THE PARTICIPATING PATIENTS WILL RECOGNIZE LEVELS OF SELF-WORTH AND CONFIDENCE NOT EXPERIENCED IN THE PAST."



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and in every community.

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To help the individuals we serve achieve mental wellness by encouraging hope, promoting safety and supporting recovery while utilizing resources efficiently.

OUR GOALS

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2. Improve clinical, physical, and environmental safety and quality for patients and residents.
3. Minimize waste of resources and cost.

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is now integrated into the psychology program itself. Those in the program will still receive counseling and therapy with the psychological services staff members but their therapist will be referring them to the TLP so they will also be learning additional skills they'll need to build themselves up.

“One thing I’ve always loved about this building is that they’ve always been encouraged to try new things with the kids,” said Marie Robinson, facilitator for the Transitional Living Program. “We found a need for some of our older children to prep them before they leave and give them some individual skills.”

Dr. Barbara Fishgrab said the TLP resulted from the psychology team looking for ways to individualize treatment and provide specific support to young people who have been in the care of the Department of Human Services and have not had the family support to help them learn the developmental skills of life.

Not every patient on the unit takes part in the TLP, but those who do are selected because they need some development in specific areas of their lives. It's all based on personal assessments that patients complete themselves, which helps focus the program on specific areas that need development.

“It’s a little bit of a window into their personality,” Robinson said. “It shows what they like, what they don’t like, what they’re lacking in, and the subjects they would like to be in.”

Once needs and interests are determined, Robinson and the patients develop a plan. It will be different for each child, and Robinson also works with Tonja Porter, who has a Bachelor of Science Degree in psychology, to add social skills training

or behavior coaching to the patient’s schedule.

Porter joined the psychology team in June of 2012, and referrals are made to her from all psychology team members. As part of her instruction in behavior coaching and social skills, Porter teaches appropriate physical, mental, and verbal boundaries. She also teaches individuals to function appropriately in a group setting and helps provide age-appropriate coping skills.

Other areas of focus in the Transitional Living Program include cooking skills, money management, household management, and even writing, which be based around writing skills or even actual penmanship.

“For instance, they may learn how to write simple, informal letters to start, but it also encourages their penmanship and their reading skills,” Robinson said. “It teaches them proper language skills.”

But Robinson said one thing they always try to do regardless of the subject they’re focused on is to keep things un-rigid and fun.

“Because they are still children, after all,” she said.

That fact is also driven home by some of the other areas of instruction in the program. In addition to teaching things like how to do laundry, how to cook, and how to manage money, the importance of personal hygiene and cleanliness can all be included in the program.

Robinson will often check with them in the morning to make sure their beds are made, messes are picked up, clothes are folded, and their rooms are clean.

“These are things that mother and

father may not have taught them,” she said. “It’s teaching them accountability for themselves and their own messes. We even teach about things like bathing and utilizing deodorant. All the basics that most kids learn at an early age, but some of our kids do not know those things when they first come here.”

One of the things many teenagers are eager to learn about is cooking, and the Transitional Living Program certainly has them covered in that area. Their cooking instruction focuses heavily on cleanliness, both with the individual and in the kitchen, and lays a foundation for making sure everything goes smoothly in the kitchen.

Robinson said the program has had some great successes over the past several months, and that’s easily demonstrated with the cooking skills some of students have learned.

“We had one individual who was the first person we put in this program, and he was so successful,” she said. “He’s been gone now about a month and a half, and we’re very hopeful for him. He didn’t have much support at home, and this meant a great deal to him.”

That individual’s experience demonstrates a perfect way this program – with its focus on real world, practical life skills – can offer hope, safety, and recovery to those in need.

“He was on it,” Robinson said. “He was up early each morning, making sure he did what needed to be done, and doing a good job with it too. This meant a lot to him.”

When learning about cooking, they’ll start with something as simple as possible, such as making an egg sandwich, and progress all the way up to cooking full meals. This individual learned how to cook, how

to set a table, and has since prepared several dishes that he served to others on the building.

Before you can cook though, you have to make sure you have ingredients. This program will go over that area with its participants as well. It teaches them about grocery shopping, how to find deals, how to choose healthy foods, and incorporates money management by having students use actual sales papers from local grocery stores to plan their purchases.

The program actually includes a money exchange. Participants earn tickets for completing their daily tasks like cleaning their room and doing laundry, and then they can redeem those tickets for “cash.” At the end of the week, they’ll use the circulars and their cash to plan meals.

“They start off with \$30 a week and they’re taught how to find good items, realistic items that they would need to live off of for a week, including grocery items and other personal items. It teaches them how to plan a budget and manage their money,” Robinson said, “because we all know money will disappear.”

One of the ways the Transitional Living Program really works hand in hand with the psychology staff members, though, is the “behavioral contract” the young people sign before they officially get in. They are asked to actually name some of their own behaviors they think they would be better off changing.

“Most of them are so realistic and honest that they’ll come in and say ‘I need to work on my profanity,’ or ‘I need to work on my attitude,’” Robinson said. “We try to let them be the ones to actually choose the behaviors, and later on, a lot of them will come back and add something else.

“I feel like if we give them an opportunity to be more individualized in their choices, then can steer them in the right direction from there.”

The program has been a success so far thanks in part to the support given to it by staff members on Oak Circle Center. They’ve donated many of the items that are in constant use, like pots, pans, and even sometimes the food. Some of the young ladies on the unit have actually learned how to crochet thanks to the efforts of staff members there. Staff members have bought into the program, but more importantly, the students on Oak Circle Center are looking forward to it and buying into it as well.

Robinson again referenced the first student who went into the Transitional Living Program.

“We saw changes in him in the first week,” she said. “He was more polite, he had something to look forward to, and it gave him something for his behavior to be focused on. He didn’t have a lot of support outside of here, but we gave him something to focus his emotions on. That’s part of what made him such a success story.”

The Transitional Living Program on Oak Circle Center is still in the early stages, but Robinson said she is excited about the possibilities.

“It will be nice when we can go forward with more kids in the program and expand it,” she said. “We all have thoughts and dreams and hopes, and one of mine is to not start a program that stands still, but to start one that really grows.”

AQUATIC DANCE MOVEMENT THERAPY COMES TO JAQUITH NURSING HOME

BY TIM DURR



Vonie' Stillson

A dip in the swimming pool is what many individuals use to combat the relentless Mississippi heat. However, this summer, some Jaquith Nursing Home (JNH) residents will utilize the pool on Mississippi State Hospital's campus for more than just beating the heat.

JNH Behavioral Health Specialist Vonie' Stillson has developed a program that utilizes Aquatic Dance Movement Therapy to address both physical and emotional issues affecting residents. She said staff will identify residents that may benefit from the program. Once identified, members of the treatment team will recommend residents for the program based on certain criteria.

Stillson explained that Aquatic Dance Movement Therapy uses the physical properties of water to allow residents to perform certain movements that help them relax. Many residents would not be able to per-

form such movements outside of the water. She said while submerged in water, buoyancy assists in supporting the weight of the individual. This decreases the amount of weight the individual is bearing, which reduces the force of stress placed on the joints. By decreasing the amount of joint stress it is easier and less painful to perform movements.

One of the first individuals to participate in the program was a JNH resident from Madison Inn. This particular individual has had several health issues, including injuries that have severely limited his mobility and caused him to live with constant pain.

He was reluctant to participate in the program and talked about how his pain affected his ability to even get into the pool. However, once in the pool, Stillson began helping him perform a variety of movements, and within a very short time, he re-

laxed and talked about how the pain had instantly subsided.

"The pool is really good," he said from the water. "I've been bending, twisting, stretching, and I have no pain. If I were not in the water I would be in so much pain right now.

"I was skeptical, but now I'm converted," the resident continued. "I have severe pain in my back and joints, but the water seems to take the pain away. It makes me want to stay in the water."

He entered the pool with Stillson and JNH worker Karl Calender holding him as he gingerly walked down the ramp into the water. The pain and anxiety he felt was evident. However, by the time the 30-minute session was about to end, the now-relaxed resident leaned against the side of the pool and began to talk about his career, how he was injured, and other events in his life.

In addition, he chose to exit the pool by walking up the steps (with a little assistance from Stillson) instead of using the ramp as he did when he entered.

“You could plainly see how his anxiety, his tension, and his nervousness had decreased compared to when he got into the pool,” Stillson said. “He was very talkative and joyful. The

time he spent in the water had a tremendous impact on his emotional state as well as his physical state.”

Stillson’s supervisor, Dr. Shenia Lyons, director of Psychology Services for JNH, observed the session, and said she was pleased with what she saw.

“I am amazed by her tenacity to see this through,” Dr. Lyons said. “Any-

time you can work to help the mind, body, and soul, you provide the residents with a better quality of life.”

Stillson is a board certified Dance Movement Therapist, as well as a certified Aquatic Rehabilitation Specialist. She will be presenting on this topic at the American Dance Movement Therapy Association’s national conference in November.

MAGNOLIA COLLEGE OF COSMETOLOGY OFFERS SERVICES TO MSH PATIENTS

BY ADAM MOORE



Magnolia College of Cosmetology recently partnered with Mississippi State Hospital to offer discounted services to MSH patients. Pictured are (l to r) student WaLeisha Strickland of Jackson, instructor Marcia Williams of Jackson, student Melissa Rawson of Ridland, student DeLaysia Robinson of Jackson, and salon manager Kathy McMurtry of Ridgeland.

A generous offer from a local community business is giving some Mississippi State Hospital patients a great new opportunity.

Magnolia College of Cosmetology has offered a discount on services for several ladies who are receiving care at Mississippi State Hospital’s Continued Treatment Services. Though it seems like a small thing for many people who may have that opportunity every

day, it makes a big difference for the ladies who are receiving inpatient care at the hospital. A trip to the salon not only lets them spend more time in the community, but getting a new hairdo in the style of their choosing does wonders to lift their spirits and boost their self-esteem.

“Magnolia College of Cosmetology wants to reach out to the community and lend a helping hand, and show

that we want to be out there,” Salon Manager Kathy McMurtry said. “So when this chance came, I jumped at it. This was a great opportunity.”

McMurtry had some previous experience that helped her understanding of just a trip like this could be a great opportunity for someone who doesn’t often get chances like it.

“Mrs. Rutha Henderson called me and

asked if we could get together and talk about the possibility of providing this service for these ladies,” McMurtry said. “I said ‘why of course,’ because I used to work in behavioral health services too, so I understood what something like this could mean for the patients.

“I did volunteer work with Hinds Behavioral Health Services, working with their clients on some lifestyle skills. I worked with them for a couple of years, teaching some things like cooking, laundry, sewing and other life skills like that.”

Rutha Henderson, whom McMurtry mentioned, is a nurse at Mississippi State Hospital who works with these ladies every day. Though this trip resulted from her efforts, at first it was actually part of an effort to promote healthy eating habits and money management skills. Henderson was looking for ways their patients could responsibly spend money besides simply eating out or buying snacks.

As McMurtry mentioned, her volunteer experience gave her an idea of how important an outing like this could be. She said she saw its posi-

tive effects by the time the ladies were all leaving, since there were smiles all around.

“We did shampoos and conditions, shampoo sets and flatirons, and a roller set too,” McMurtry said. “I think they really enjoyed themselves.”

Magnolia College of Cosmetology has three different buildings as part of its complex on I-55. It includes the salon as well as an administrative building and a classroom building. The salon is open for appointments and walk-ins, and the work is completed by students at the school. It’s a good opportunity for the students to learn the ins and outs of their trade and get experience beyond the classroom.

Marcia Williams was the instructor for the students who were performing the styling, and she said it was a good experience all around. They did a full client consultation with one of the hospital patients, who let them know exactly how she wanted her hair styled.

“She knew what she wanted, so the student and I were able to get some feedback, and follow on with her in-

structions. She let us know, and that’s what we wanted to hear, and she was very happy when she left,” Williams said.

Dr. Kay Desai, Service Chief for the Continued Treatment Service, said the trip to the salon brought some normalcy into the lives of these patients who don’t often spend much time in the community.

“They get to plan and prepare for the trip and have choices regarding their beauty needs,” she said. It not only improves their socialization and money management skills, but it heightens their self-esteem as well.”

With a touch of humor though, she also noted the reason why they first began looking for additional opportunities for these ladies.

“As an added benefit,” she said with a smile, “now they will not spend all their money on unhealthy snacks but save some for the salon trip.”

WHEN STRENGTH MEANT SILENCE

WOMEN'S GRIEF GROUP

THIS POEM IS A COLLABORATION OF WOMEN ON THE CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY UNIT

When strong was silent we just could not say
All that we'd lost along our way
All that we suffered, silenced by shame
When strength meant no tears
we drowned in our blame

They were aunts, they were uncles, daughters and sons
They were mam maws and papaws, such precious ones.
They were fiances and friends and sisters and brothers,
For some of us they were our fathers and mothers.

Beautiful blue, big brown, or green
Their eyes, they still sparkle in memories and dreams.
Whether dark hair, or blond, some short and some tall
Booming or tiny their voice we recall.

It brought us such joy, to be by their side
To cook or to clean, to take the garden in stride
When she'd sing me to sleep, I felt at peace
When he'd play with his dog, such a simple release.

All the silly faces he made, that spread cheer around,
In the jokes that she'd crack, laughter was found.
After work he'd come home and say "I love you,"
It was the day he was born, that joy came into view.

I'll never forget when he first saw our baby's faces,
Or the day she got married, or traveling new places.
lest I forget how she took up for me,
Or how she talked of college and the things that could be.

When we learned of their death, emotions abound
We stifled them under, and erased the sound.
Told strength is silence, dry eyes and no tears,
So we "held it together" for all of these years.

Underneath silence lay rage, shock and shame.
We felt sad, we were angry with heartache and blame.
We went to the funeral and we did not attend,
Shame feeds on silence and we could make no amends.

Some offered words with platitudinous violence,
While others gave food, drugs and drinks in exchange for our
silence.
Every "you have to move on" and "it's all okay"
Forced our mouths closed, when there was so much to say.
They whispered softly "She's in a better place,"
I'd been kicking and screaming and told "it's a waste."

You couldn't imagine all that we lost,
Not even I could have fathomed the cost.
We lost worldly possessions like houses and cars.
But, when we lost our loved ones we lost more by far.

My heart became heavy, I lost myself and my mind,
We lost all hope and did not seek to find.
We lost sanity, pride and our voices
lost our sobriety and saw very few choices.
We lived in a landscape so anxious and tense,
Tired bodies, scattered minds, trying to make sense.

Then came the fear, that much like shame,
Fed on our silence bolstered our blame.
Afraid I won't forget her, or remember his face.
I fear I'll never love again, or be trapped in this place.
I fear not forgiving and being forgiven,
I'm scared of attaching to someone else who is living.

Here in this group, alongside wounded souls
We redefined strength in a way that was whole.
I saw such strong women speak through their tears.
Watched as they unleashed the pain, stifled for years.
We challenged the messages, we'd always believed.
We tore down the lies and together we grieved.

We honored our loss, ourselves and pain,
By pushing through darkness, and shedding some shame.
Now we'll honor those we lost, their life and their love,
By living each day, over and above.

To help raise his daughter, to be a good son.
To live each day grateful for the previous one.
I will honor this loss by finding happiness here,
I'll keep a sense of humor and keep my mind clear.

We are feeling our feelings, and being IN life,
The new Strength is both joy and equally strife.
like a garden needs rain, we needed our tears
To feel our emotions, to come along side our fears.

We lit the way out of loss with a light that hope brings,
There is hope for my future and so many things.
My children, my family, my new trust in myself,
I draw hope from my strength and my new attitude,
My faith and my willingness to conquer my moods.
I'm working on me and that's a big first,
So I've made hope for myself, and for life, have a new thirst.

When strong was silent we just could not say
All that we'd lost along our way
In the past we succumbed and did not make a sound
Today we redefined Strength and Will speak
what we have found.

FRIENDS OF MISSISSIPPI STATE HOSPITAL HOSTS FIREWORKS SHOW ON JUNE 30

BY ADAM MOORE



Mississippi State Hospital's employees, patients, JNH residents, and all of their friends and family members are invited to a classic summer tradition this month.

Friends of Mississippi State Hospital is hosting an Independence Day fireworks show on the evening of Monday, June 30 and everyone who would like to come is welcome to join in the celebration. The Friends organization is a volunteer group committed to promoting awareness of mental health issues and improving the lives of individuals served through Mississippi State Hospital. Thanks to Friends members and the group's corporate sponsors, the fireworks show is free for anyone and everyone who would like to attend.

"This show is a great opportunity for people to not only get out and enjoy a night of food, fun, and fireworks, but it also gives people a chance to learn about mental health and wellness, and that's one of the most important

things we try to do with the Friends organization," said Joel Ross, President of Friends of MSH.

The annual event will be at the hospital's Whitfield campus and, besides the professional fireworks display, attendees will be able to enjoy a community festival of food, games and family-friendly activities. Games and activities will be available from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., and food and refreshments will be for sale as well. The fireworks will begin lighting up the sky at 9 p.m.

The display will be performed by Pyrotecnico, a pyrotechnics and special effects company with a history dating back 120 years. The professional show is a highlight of the year at MSH, and always an especially good time for individuals who are there receiving treatment and away from the friends and family members they would usually spend time with on holidays.

Visitors coming to the show are welcome to bring lawn chairs or blankets

to help enjoy the evening. However, please note that pets and personal cameras are not allowed on the Mississippi State Hospital campus, and tobacco and alcohol are prohibited.

The celebration is made possible through community sponsorships by BankPlus, Valley Services, Ergon, and Mississippi Hospital Association.

"We're thankful for our partners in the community who have enabled Friends to provide this event," Ross said. "Their generosity lets us put on a great event for those individuals receiving services at Mississippi State Hospital, but we're also glad to make this open to anyone else who would like to come enjoy a fun night."

If you would like more information, or learn about more volunteer opportunities at Mississippi State Hospital, contact Mississippi State Hospital Public Relations at 601-351-8018.