

# Two central city homeless programs expand mental health services

Two Central City agencies started the new fiscal year July 1 with expanded services for the homeless mentally ill.

S.F. Health Department's Mental Health Services in April awarded a total of \$700,000 to five programs that serve the homeless and uninsured poor, particularly those with mental health problems.

Swords to Plowshares and Oasis Community Center, both located on Market Street between 6th and 7th, received \$268,000 of this increase.

South of Market Multi-Service Center, Instituto Familiar de la Raza and Community Vocational Enterprises were awarded the remaining \$432,000.

"I really applaud the city for acknowledging that vets are a part of this community for the first time in a long time," said Kym Valadez, program director for Swords to Plowshares. "There is always the presumption that the VA is taking care of the vets, but it has its constraints, too. There should be a collaboration between the VA and the community."

Swords to Plowshares for 26 years has provided information, referrals, support and treatment to San Francisco's vets. Swords received \$38,500 this spring to expand its services and got \$154,000 more July 1. The new money enables Swords to spend more time with each client, Valadez said.

Sometimes the system is

just too complicated, she said, and vets disappear after receiving a referral, instead of getting the services they need. Now, with the new money, staff not only can help vets develop plans to get off the streets and stabilize their lives, she said, but to provide hands-on help to deal with bureaucracy, complete applications for benefits and get treatment. A vet who needs safe or drug-free housing as part of their plan for getting off the street now can draw on a Swords housing fund to get a place to stay while working on their plan.

Oasis Community Center, just up Market from Swords, has become popular with the area's homeless, many with a history of mental illness, most with substance abuse problems. Open from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., Oasis usually has a crowd watching big-screen TV. Some are waiting to be examined by the nurse practitioner, others to attend a harm reduction group, get acupuncture or talk with a peer counselor.

Oasis received \$40,000 this spring to expand from five to seven days a week, and \$114,000 more on July 1 to continue operating seven days a week.

"We're one of the few cen-

ters open on weekends, especially on Sunday," according to Anthony Cleckley, in charge of Oasis.

The Office of Self Help has a computer lab, a nurse two days a week who does physical exams and provides medical consultation, and support groups. OSH also used the new money to add support for mentally ill substance abusers, which

substance abuse and mental health department, said the coalition "surveyed about 300 mental health consumers and found that the main reason they didn't get services was difficulty navigating the bureaucracy."

Last year the city added \$1.3 million to the Community Mental Health Services budget for the fiscal year ending June 30 to assure a single standard of care. CMHS coordinated a community process in which mental health consumers, providers and advocates determined how to make services

easier to get, then drafted a request for proposals. Louise Rogers, CMHS assistant director for risk management and development, said a portion of the \$1.3 million would be used to provide more flexibility in traditional clinic services and the rest to provide nonclinical services. The selection process was finally completed in early 2000.

But before the winners could be announced, the Health Department told Mental Health that it wouldn't get any new money in fiscal year 2000-01. Michelle Ruggels, fiscal officer for Mental Health, said Public Health told CMHS that

it would have to cover the increasing cost of doing business in San Francisco, including jumps in salaries and rents, with what it had.

CMHS redirected \$600,000 of the carryover \$1.3 million to cover some of the increased costs for maintaining existing services. When winners of the selection process were announced, five programs received a total of \$700,000.

The lobbying has continued for restoration of the \$600,000.

"We've had decades of cuts in times of shortage; now that there's a time of surplus, it's ridiculous that mental health consumers are being cut again," said Friedenbach.

The supervisors, in final budget deliberations, added \$1 million to the CMHS budget for this fiscal year, restoring seven staff positions that had been cut and part of the funds for easier access to care. Final calculations haven't been made but it appears that more than \$450,000 of the \$600,000 will be restored.

Rogers said that CMHS still has the rankings of programs that submitted proposals last year and that list will be used to select the additional proposals to be funded.

The budget will become final August 1 and the additional funds for improved access to services could be available to programs in October, Ruggels said.

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by Sherry Barto

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