Promising Practices

Amanecer Community Counseling Services

by Mark Katz, Ph.D.

Parents, educators, health-care providers and well-informed consumers are finding creative ways to address the needs of those who struggle with AD/HD. In each issue of Attention!® magazine, we highlight one innovative program, model or practice and pass on appropriate contacts so that you can implement similar efforts in your community.

Responding to the Needs of Inner-City Latino Children with AD/HD and Their Families

any poor and working-poor Hispanic/Latino parents of children and teens with attention-deficit/ hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) have virtually no access to needed services. For Hispanic/Latino families residing in and around Los Angeles' Pico-Union/Wilshire District, things appear to be changing, due to the efforts of Amanecer Community Counseling Services.

Dedicated to serving the mental-health needs of Central Los Angeles' Hispanic/Latino families, the non-profit organization recently began rolling out the first in a series of evidence-based practices designed to prevent and reduce problems associated with a range of disruptive behavior disorders, among them AD/HD. Amanecer, which signifies "a new beginning," offers all programs in Spanish, since so many of the parents it serves speak little or no English. For families not covered by Medi-Cal or other sources, Amanecer offers no-cost or low-cost funding programs. Amanecer sought and obtained special funding for its AD/HD program from QueensCare.



In this initial phase, staff members focus primarily on parent education and parent-teen communication skill building. Staff members draw heavily upon an 18-step communication model designed to increase family harmony, increase parent and teen use of problem-solving skills and positive communication styles, improve teens' cooperation with parental requests, and alter any unreasonable beliefs (teen or parent) that present barriers to improved communication.

To promote parent participation, program therapists John Durall, M.A., LMFT, and Marisol Garduno, MSW, ASW, offer parents the opportu-

nity to participate in their own token economy. Parents can earn points for attendance and points for applying the lesson materials. At specific intervals, they can turn in their points for pre-paid gift cards. "It's working really well," say Durall and Garduno. "The neat thing is that we are walking the talk—we are doing the strategies that we ask the parents or teens to do. And it's getting results! We're beginning to see improved behavioral outcomes."

All parents also receive Dr. José Bauermeister's book, Hiperactivo, Impulsivo, Distraido ¿Me Conoces? Families wishing to pursue medication as an option have access to Amanecer's two consulting psychiatrists, who are available to educate families about the safe and effective use of medication, and to monitor medication on an ongoing basis.

Family-centered programs

During the next phase, Amanecer plans to roll out school-based parent and teacher education programs at a neighborhood elementary school. Says Durall, "Our goal is to develop a truly comprehensive AD/HD multimodal treatment program where Latino families would have access to an array of individualized services based upon their unique needs."

Actually, Amanecer may be closer to achieving its vision than staff realize. Amanecer already offers the following array of strengthsbased, family-centered programs and services, all easily accessible to families of children and teens with AD/HD:

- Children's System of Care Program (SOC). Amanecer therapists and case managers team with other professional disciplines and local school and community resources to locate and tailor services to improve the quality of life for children and youth at risk of hospitalization, arrest, or loss of their foster-home placement because of a behavioral crisis.
- WRAPAROUND, a multi-agency, community-based approach grounded in a philosophy of unconditional care. Services that are not going well are changed, not removed. WRAP-AROUND provides strengths-based, family-centered care to high-needs children, youth and families experiencing multiple, complex and



Conference Notes

Mark Katz, Ph.D., will present Innovative Educational Programs at CHADD's annual conference in Washington, D.C., Nov. 7-10, 2007. Visit www.chadd.org for more information.

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enduring mental health and behavioral challenges.

- Children's Intensive Services Program (ISP) gives families access to round-the-clock, intensive, short-term crisis intervention services should a child be in danger of harming himself or others. Services are also proving very helpful to families of children recently discharged from hospitals.
- Family Preservation Counseling Services, for families involved in the juvenile court/dependency system. Services are designed to strengthen family support systems and coping strategies in order to prevent risk of separation.
- Cityscape Children's Therapeutic Arts Program gives children and teens access to after-school, arts-based therapeutic groups, including psychodrama, music, drumming, dance and visual arts. Services also include group counseling, group sessions for the entire family, and a weekly parents' group.
- School-Based Services, which provide an array of mental-health services to ten neighborhood schools, including individual, group and family therapy, as well as case management, crisis intervention and psychiatric services on an as-needed basis.

"By adding evidence-based AD/HD practices to Amanecer's other services," says John Durall, "we'll be able to share information on important advances in the understanding of AD/HD with those we work closely with, like the role of executive function delays, and why it's critical to offer services in actual situations where problems are occurring ('the point of performance'). All of our programs-whether school-based or community-based-can only benefit."



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Those interested in learning more about Amanecer's vision for providing comprehensive AD/HD services to traditionally underserved populations are encouraged to e-mail John Durall at jdurall@ccsla.org. Those interested in learning more about Amanecer's overall array of services, and how these services are being tailored to meet the mental-health needs of local Hispanic/Latino families, are encouraged to e-mail Amanecer's Children's Clinic Director, Teddie Valenzuela, LCSW, at tvalenzuela@ ccsla.org, or Amanecer's Executive Director, Tim Ryder, MBA, tryder@ccsla.org. ■

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Amanecer's goal "is to develop a truly comprehensive AD/HD multimodal treatment program where Latino families would have access to an array of individualized services," according to one program therapist.

FOR MORE INFO For a list of references from this article, please visit www.chadd. org/attention/references.