

Cri-Help's Socorro

Socorro is one of Cri-Help's two service centers, providing a spectrum of addiction treatment services including residential and outpatient care in the Lincoln Heights area of Los Angeles. Socorro offers all its services in both Spanish and English. This summer, Marco Pardo talked with a few of Socorro's staff members about their work, and their experience with the clients in treatment.

Town Hall Addresses the San Fernando Valley Crystal Meth Epidemic

On February 28, 2007, Cri-Help hosted the first Town Hall Meeting to address the Crystal Meth Epidemic in the San Fernando Valley. Subsequent to that, a Crystal Meth Task Force had been organized to address the issues that are pertinent to the San Fernando Valley. We have sub-committees that are focused on Youth, Prevention and Education, Web Site Development, and Public Relations. Epidemiological studies in Los Angeles County have demonstrated significant Crystal Meth abuse throughout all demographic areas, but especially among Men Having Sex With Men (MSM) and Latina Woman (ages 14-30). Our Mission is to:

- Address the growing concern of the Crystal Meth Epidemic in the San Fernando Valley
- Engage in Community Mobilization
- Educate and inform the public and at-risk communities about the detrimental effects of Crystal Meth and where individuals can get treatment

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For More information about Crystal Meth, visit the following websites

www.crystaltownhalls.org
www.solameth.org
www.actnowagainstmeth.org

Priscilla Wilson Kitchen Supervisor

Marco Pardo: Priscilla, what do you do at Socorro?

Priscilla Wilson: I'm the Kitchen Supervisor, I cook, prepare meals – I've done this for the last 3 to 4 years.

MP: Do you have much interaction with the clients here?

Priscilla: Oh yes, every day – all day long! Working with them, teaching them how to how to cook, talking with them about recovery...because I've been where they've been – especially the young girls that come in. I really connect with them because I came in young, really young – I was 18 or 19.

MP: When you came into the program?

Priscilla: Yes. I went through Cri-Help, the Pflieger Center, which really has the same program structure as the one here at Socorro. Of course, there's a cultural difference. I'm American Indian, and I feel a little more comfortable here. The foods we serve reflect more variety – our menu includes more ethnic foods. Some of the clients appear to be less open-minded at first, because they may think that...well, recovery is a white thing...

MP: Yes, of course – for a lot of people, the concept of recovery is a white middle-class value. So for people of varied ethnicities to come in, might come in a little suspect. What do you do to increase their comfort level?

Priscilla: For me, I compare my story to theirs. Some members of my family say that treatment is a crutch, where we have to rely on something else. My grandfather used to tell me, this

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Socorro Residential Treatment Facility

David Cisneros

Chemical Dependency Worker

Marco Pardo: So, David, you're a case worker here at Socorro. How long have you been doing this work?

David Cisneros: In 2001 I came to Cri-Help as a volunteer, teaching clients to read and write – and I was asked to develop their literacy program. From there I moved up to technician and counselor.

MP: What is it about Socorro, its staff and clients, that attracts you to come here and work?

David: I love working people who are struggling with addiction. I love working for Cri-Help because of its integrity – and our shared goal – to help individuals recover from the disease of addiction, to help them get their lives back, get their families back, so that they can become productive members of society.

MP: Socorro serves a primary community in Los Angeles. Do

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Narciso Espinoza Intake Supervisor

Narciso Espinoza: I've been with Socorro since it was at its previous location on Huntington Drive in El Sereno. I managed the Socorro Sober Living facility, then worked in Outpatient, and now am Intake Specialist at Socorro's Residential Facility. I never left, let's put it that way (laughter).

MP: What are your feelings for Socorro?

Narciso: Overall, with respect to Cri-Help, Incorporated, overall, I feel it's the best treatment available today. I believe that strongly because of the people that I work with. The treatment curriculum, structure – and the staff diversity – is more relevant and better equipped to work with the growing proportion of Hispanic/Latinos entering treatment.

MP: So you see the need for treatment for Latinos increasing in Los Angeles?

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Priscilla Q&A Continued

rely on something else. My grandfather used to tell me, this is not Indian – you know, I don't care what it is...I'm here now – and I tell clients, you're here now, this is the opportunity to heal whatever culture you come from.

MP: So...even while you're doing the work of the kitchen, it gives you time to share with the clients your experience as a woman, a young woman, an ethnic woman. So these are things you have in common with them.

Priscilla: I think they ask because there is a strong connection, they identify with me and with my experience.

MP: You could work someplace else, you choose to work at Socorro, is there a reason? What is it about Socorro that you choose to work here?

Priscilla: I have a passion for this place. I have left and come back a couple of times.

MP: What brings you back?

Priscilla: I just love it! I really do – I love it here.

MP: What makes Socorro so loveable?

Priscilla: The food! – I really enjoy cooking, and I like to see the clients eat well. And a lot of them didn't take care of themselves before treatment, they never had three meals a day. I like to give them a variety, so that it doesn't seem institutional. I mean, I guess it is an institution (laughter), but yeah, I try to cook from scratch a lot.

MP: So you want them to feel like they're having home-cooked food.

Priscilla: Exactly. You hit it.

MP: So the passion you feel for Socorro and Cri-Help is really passion for the clients.

Priscilla: Of course, it's all about them. How they're doing, what they eat, what they like, how it's prepared, all that. I want them to feel at home

MP: It seems to me that what you're talking about speaks to their dignity. So, you give to the

clients...what do they give to you?

Priscilla: They remind me of where I come from. The newcomers that come in – it's like, I never want to be where they are now. Very resistant ladies – I remember that well.

MP: Are you able to break through that resistance?

Priscilla: Sometimes, yes. Sometimes it's hard for them to hear the message of hope.

MP: When they do hear you, what do you tell them?

Priscilla: I don't give up. I'll talk to them, let them know that it's OK, that I've been where they've been – or where they're at.

MP: So you're comfortable sharing your story, your experience ...

Priscilla: There's a lot more going on in the kitchen than cooking!

Priscilla: Oh yes!

MP: Are you ever at the completion ceremonies?

Priscilla: Yes, I go to every completion. I'm so proud of them, proud that they've made it. Hopefully, they can continue on. If they've put on a few pounds, I'm all the happier. I don't make them eat – but if they like it, I'm delighted.



David Q&A Continued

community in Los Angeles. Do you see anything as special need in this Latino community?

David: This community – and in particular I like coming to this community to work – because of the need...the drugs, the gangs that are in this environment. Many need an alternative. There are many single parents raising families – if there are families at all...it's easy for kids growing up with no direction to get involved with negative elements. Socorro gives them a sanctuary, a safe place to come and learn and grow and change – and become mature – and to get their lives back together.

MP: So you see this community as a place where young people can easily get sidetracked into destructive lifestyles.

David: Young and old. In this community it's generational. And usually around the age of 35 it seems like they make a decision to continue with the lifestyle, or to make a change. Some who want to reduce their risk that comes with hard drugs and crime, many become alcoholic and continue their addiction in another unhealthy way. We have a population here from eighteen to

sixty-plus, and there's a dire need in this community, and I don't see it going away fast.

MP: What have you seen Socorro offer these clients?

David: Socorro offers a place to learn about the disease of addiction, learn about recovery, and develop a support network in Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous, where they can become members and find that support and get back on their feet. Especially the Hispanic

population, there are not that many opportunities for Spanish-speaking addicts – and Cri-Help does that, especially here at Socorro.

MP: So you see this population as being underserved.

David: Yes, and Socorro is a place of hope for them. We have Spanish-speaking treatment curriculum, groups and classes in Spanish, we see that meetings and sponsors who speak Spanish are available – there's a place here for them. Once they access that, they take the message home to their family and community, and it opens the door for others to come in as well. No one gets turned away. If we can't meet their needs, we find what they need to help them.

MP: For someone coming to work at Socorro, what would you tell them they need to be successful here?

David: Fundamental compassion and patience – and a lot of self-care to keep themselves strong. If someone remains client-centered, they'll go far.

MP: What's your assessment of the staff?

David: As a team, excellent, which is one of the reasons I love working at this agency. The focus is on the client – with a special focus on the underprivileged client who can't afford treatment. I like that. As a team, as an organization, it always comes down to the client. I've seen this organization go above and beyond for the client during my time here. The organization will go "outside the box" to help each individual client.

MP: What brings you the most satisfaction in your work?

David: All of it. Being a recovering addict and ex-con – and a second-generation one at that – being able to recover, and then ask myself, "how am I going to make my past work for my future", well this is the perfect place. That's my purpose. To utilize my past experience to help others as I move towards my future. And this organization is a perfect place to do that.

Narciso Q&A Continued

Narciso: Definitely. The volume of calls we get for Latinos requesting treatment – both Spanish-speaking and English speaking – are close to 80% at Socorro.

MP: What is it about Socorro that makes it a good place for Latinos to come?

Narciso: I think that one of the key facts in our success is in the word 'culture.' Our bilingual capability is an important part of it – but only part. The culture of Socorro is consistent with the values and beliefs of many of the participants that are requesting treatment from the local community.

MP: So you find that the program and the staff are language and culturally sensitive to the local community?

Narciso: Definitely. And as the Intake Worker, I get the first contact with future clients and their families by phone – and those are the questions that I hear, "how can we get family visits?," "Can my kids come", and all those things are provided at Socorro.

MP: So if a new staff person was to come here, what would you tell them that they need to know in order to be an effective team member at Socorro?

Narciso: I believe in the long-standing policies and procedures that Cri-Help has had in place here for decades – that we treat every client the same, regardless of culture – while we are simultaneously respectful to and understanding of their culture.

MP: So if you're going to work at Socorro, you need to have a feel for the role that family plays, and invite family involvement through an individual's course of treatment.

Narciso: Exactly. And understanding each client's values and belief system is as important.

MP: How do you interface with the family throughout treatment?

Narciso: One of the most important events at the beginning is when family members to have opportunity to speak with one of our staff – often in Spanish – that reduces their fear and anxiety of the unknown. We prepare the family for some education about addiction and the family dynamics that relate to drug/alcohol use. Family visits are also important, when more and more become involved to support their loved one.

MP: So as the family progresses in their understanding of the disease and of treatment, it gives more support to each client.

Narciso: Definitely. And by the end of the client's end of treatment, it's like seeing a rose blossom – or let me put it this way. When I see a client at this point, successfully working and families helping out, all working together – it's like seeing a butterfly emerge from a cocoon. Seeing that transformation is one of the most fulfilling experiences I have working at Socorro.



More on Socorro's services

Residential treatment at Socorro involves a 24-hour therapeutic environment, allowing participants the time and space conducive to the whole life change necessary for lasting recovery. Variable-length individualized treatment plans correspond to clinical need, incorporating individual and group counseling, linkage to medical services, relapse prevention, spirituality support, recreation and fitness activities, and life skills assistance. The treatment curriculum thoroughly integrates 12-step philosophy and activities. Families are invited to



participate in education on addiction, and counseling to support their loved one's recovery.

Traditional and Intensive Outpatient treatment at Socorro is comprised of structured group and individual counseling and thorough 12-step integration. Groups address the neurobiology of addiction, 12-Step concepts and utilization in recovery, relapse prevention, anger management, case management as well as gender-specific recovery issues.

Town Hall Continued

Members of the Task Force represent local community based organizations, recovery homes, treatment centers, neighborhood councils, youth agencies, churches, and businesses. If you are interested in participating with this Task Force please contact either Brad Leathers at 310-989-0599 or wehobrad@aol.com or Heather Edney at HeatherE@cri-help.org. Our next meeting is scheduled for September 6, 2007.

Client Testimonial

I'm a drug addict. I know about needles and pipes and jail. I'm gonna die miserable. At least that's what I used to think. Today it's different. Today I look up instead of down. Today I feel, and deal with my emotions. I can laugh and cry and wake up the next day and do it again. I can be there for my family now. I love this staying clean thing. It's not always fine and dandy but it's more than I could have asked for. I feel like I'm on an upward flight, and every day I stay clean and I get higher, see more and conquer more fear. I'm a drug addict. I know about life without drugs now, and I'm gonna live like I never lived before.

- Robert Lopez