



CONTRA COSTA COUNTY
MENTAL HEALTH
COMMISSION

The Contra Costa County Mental Health Commission has a dual mission: 1) To influence the County's Mental Health System to ensure the delivery of quality services which are effective, efficient, culturally relevant and responsive to the needs and desires of the clients it serves with dignity and respect; and 2) to be the advocate with the Board of Supervisors, the Mental Health Division, and the community on behalf of all Contra Costa County residents who are in need of mental health services.

July 8, 2011

Governor Jerry Brown
c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Honorable Governor Brown:

The Contra Costa Mental Health Commission, in partnership with NAMI Contra Costa and Mental Health Consumer Concerns, Inc., respectfully requests the assistance of all who govern, oversee, and protect the rights of the psychiatrically disabled of Contra Costa County. Pursuant to the Welfare and Institution Code 5650, the Mental Health Commission shall: "Review and evaluate the community's mental health needs, services, facilities, and special problems." At a Special Meeting of our Mental Health Commission on June 29, 2011, our Commission met with our community partners and county residents to review and evaluate recent actions by our Board of Supervisors in regards to an appeal of a use permit for an adult residential facility in Knightsen, CA.

In a letter to the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors dated July 1, 2011 we expressed deep concern with the restrictive actions taken by the Board on June 21, 2011 in regards to the use permit for the Knightsen Farm Project. The Commission and the community's concern goes beyond the use permit for this project. We view this as a serious case of stigma and discrimination and a uniquely hostile regulatory environment for non-profits who are seeking to bring their behavioral health housing services to Contra Costa County.

The Mental Health Commission along with community stakeholders and leaders believe that the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors ignored their own Planning Commission, the recommendations and expertise of their Conservation and Development staff, including the traffic division, their Mental Health Commission, Community Care Licensing guidelines, numerous community and faith leaders and the consumers and families of Contra Costa when they issued a list of restrictions to the land use permit for the Knightsen Farm.

Mental health stakeholders expressed in the strongest terms that the perception is that the Board knowingly killed this project after stalling it for months. This perception is based on the Board's own staff reports which clearly indicated that the restrictions would make the project financially infeasible. In a clear call to action our mental health community stakeholders expressed in the strongest possible terms that the Contra Costa Mental Health Commission, with its community partners, pursue all avenues of protection for those consumers with a psychiatric disability who require community placement in Contra Costa County.



The Contra Costa County Mental Health Commission is appointed by the Board of Supervisors to advise them on all matters related to the county's mental health system, in accordance with mandates set forth in the California State Welfare & Institutions Code, Sections 5604 (a)(1)-5605.5. Any comments or recommendations made by the Mental Health Commission or its individual members do not represent the official position of the county or any of its officers.

07-14-11 P12:44 IN

A brief history of the housing needs in Contra Costa would show that the issues of citing psychiatric facilities and supported behavioral health housing programs have been faced with challenges. Pleasant Hill, CA, a town in Contra Costa County, was mentioned in the SAMSHA report, "Combating Nimbyism-What a Difference a Community Makes" when the Crestwood Pleasant Hill facility was seeking a use permit. That facility was successful in opening only based on the fear of lawsuits and the realization that blocking the facility would constitute discrimination. While Crestwood Pleasant Hill has opened and the community fears have been proven wrong, the restrictions of that use permit still prevent some mental health consumers from legal placement there to this day.

At a time of great change in California's public mental health system we seek your help. We respectfully request assistance from those local, State and Federal departments and organizations charged with protecting the rights of the psychiatrically disabled and guaranteeing that they are allowed to live in all neighborhoods both rural and urban. We especially request that the full protections of the California Fair Housing Laws and the American Disability Act be provided to the Bonita House Inc as they pursue the dream of Contra Costa County mental health consumers and families to create a therapeutic farm in Knightsen, CA.

We specifically seek the support and advice of the California Mental Health Planning Council who is mandated in state law to provide oversight of the public mental health system and additionally to advise the Legislature, Department of Mental Health, and county boards on mental health issues and the policies and priorities that this state should be pursuing. The Planning Council's own report on Crisis Residential Programs in March of 2010 refers to the "1963 Community Mental Health Centers Act and the Olmstead Decision of 1999" when advocating for residential programs. That report emphasizes the cost savings, state and federal laws, social policies and recovery philosophy that support the type of therapeutic farm that Bonita House, Inc has been seeking to open in Knightsen, CA for the past three years. Site and zoning considerations are also referenced along with the need to challenge all resistance to integrating "...those living with disabilities into their communities and accommodate their needs."

In solidarity the Contra Costa Mental Health Commission, NAMI Contra Costa and Mental Health Consumer Concerns have combined their mission statements and passion to challenge the resistance to this use permit and housing project. We invite you to join us either personally or by written testimony when we appear before our Board of Supervisors beginning no earlier than 11:00am Tuesday July 12, 2011 to hear the final decision on the issuance of the permit. This call to action will not end on Tuesday July 12th but will be sustained with the support of our community partners as we begin our protest, education, and outreach to all who support civil rights and human dignity.

We will continue to reach out in respectful dialogue as we have previously done through invitation to our meetings and future community forums in hopes of providing a teachable moment to our entire community and our own Board of Supervisors. Through an organized effort, the Contra Costa Mental Health Commission, NAMI CC and MHCC will outreach to all media and social networking sites to declare an end to discrimination and NIMBYISM in Contra Costa County. We will confront the stigma and discrimination by seeking support of local, national and state sponsors of anti-stigma efforts such as NAMI CA and National, Stigma Busters, SAMHSA's Address Discrimination and Stigma (ADS) Center and Elimination of Barriers Initiative (EBI), and encourage our faith based communities to consider the Pathways to Promise- Ministry and Mental Illness took kit.

In describing stigma Goffman in 1963 referred to “a sign of disgrace or discredit which sets a person apart from others.” All 12 pages of the restrictions recommended by the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors on June 21, 2011 wreak of stigma and discrimination and will in effect set the ten residents of the proposed Bonita House Farm apart from the other Knightsen residents and all residents of Contra Costa County. Please assist our efforts and denounce the orchestrated efforts of the Knightsen Community, including their School Superintendent, and the political maneuvers of city and county leaders in a campaign of disgrace against Bonita House, Inc and the vulnerable and legally protected class of citizens attempting to live at 2950 Penny Lane in Knightsen, CA.

This climate of fear and discrimination must end. At a time of great financial turmoil local, state and nationwide, a group of Contra Costa families raised funds to open a therapeutic farm to serve the psychiatrically disabled in the least restricted way. Funds were donated along with a ten acre property and house generously gifted by Ann and Jon Reynolds to the highly respected Bonita House, Inc. This effort was the essence of a public and private partnership that our current financial climate begs us to embrace. The below stated partners organizations ask all state, federal, and community based leaders of government, education, clergy, labor, and public health to join our effort to make this dream a reality.

Thank you.

Contra Costa Mental Health Commission
Mental Health Consumer Concerns, Inc.
NAMI Contra Costa

Please direct any inquiries to the Executive Assistant to the Mental Health Commission:

Linda Cipolla
1340 Arnold Drive, Ste. 200
Martinez, CA 94553
linda.cipolla@hsd.cccounty.us
925-957-5140

Cc: Contra Costa County, Clerk of the Board
Contra Costa Grand Jury
California Mental Health Planning Council
Contra Costa County State Representatives
Contra Costa County Federal Representatives
Disability Rights, Inc.
California Network of Mental Health Clients
CASRA
MHSOAC
SAMHSA
NAMI CA, National, and Stigma Busters