

newvistas



winter 2018, volume 30, number 2

stronger families... brighter futures... since 1957

“Vista Hill Gave Me My Life Back”

Danielle's remarkable journey inside

inside

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Mom Turns Life Around with Help of Multiple Vista Hill Programs

Four years ago Danielle finally hit rock bottom: Addicted to pills and alcohol since she was a teen, she was now hooked on crystal methamphetamine and had just been told her two-year-old son was about to be taken away permanently and put up for adoption.

The good news is that with the help of Vista Hill services, Danielle was able to completely turn her life around. Today, she's sober and healthy, has a happy family life with her son and daughter, and this month will graduate with a degree in organizational management from Point Loma Nazarene University.

What makes Danielle's story even more interesting is that she got her life back on track by taking advantage of no less than a half dozen different Vista Hill services, each addressing a specific need or issue she faced.

"I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am to Vista Hill for all the amazing things it has done for me," Danielle says. "The skills and support they provided me made all the difference. Vista Hill's tagline of 'Stronger Families . . . Brighter Futures' truly came true for us."

Danielle's first contact with Vista Hill came seven years ago when she enrolled at the ParentCare Family Recovery Center. She didn't graduate but was able to get clean so her son was born drug free. Unfortunately, a relapse into meth use led Child Welfare Services (CWS) to remove her son and place him with foster parents.

It took the news that CWS was going to recommend her son's foster parents be allowed to adopt the boy that finally shocked Danielle into giving up meth for good. But she knew to stop the adoption process and have a chance of getting him back, she needed help. Danielle first enrolled in Vista Hill's Bridges Intensive Outpatient Program (a previous Vista Hill Program), which provided her the substance abuse counseling and support she needed to stay sober.

Danielle's next crucial step was to take advantage of the Incredible Families program, which provides mental health and supportive services with the key objective of helping children who have been removed from their parents reunify with their family. A few months later, Danielle regained permanent custody of her son.

Realizing she was not yet ready to face the world on her own and needing more help, Danielle re-enrolled in ParentCare and this time graduated with an array of newly acquired skills on how to be a better parent and create a safe and productive environment for her family. Within the Family Treatment and Recovery Services umbrella, Danielle

took advantage of placing her son in the Therapeutic Learning Center day care facility; became involved in the ParentCare Alumni Training program to develop professional skills and

work experience; and she and her son Jeremy, now 6, and daughter Mia, 3, moved to the Vista Hill (Sober Living) Apartments, which provides them with low-cost transitional housing in a safe and sober environment.

"I know that using all these services makes me look like a poster child for Vista Hill, but I can honestly say that each and every one of the programs I attended were critical to transforming my previous life to my current life of recovery," Danielle says. "I am so appreciative that these all-encompassing services gave me the opportunity to completely change my life. Most importantly, I am now fully equipped to be a good parent and provide the life and experiences my children need to thrive and grow. That's the greatest reward I could ever ask for."



**Your Gifts
helped this mom
turn her life
around**

2017 PROGRAM OUTCOMES:

ParentCare (219 Clients Served)

- 100% of the babies born were negative for alcohol and drugs.
- 96% of clients had no new arrests while in the program.
- 85% of the women report being employed or enrolled in school at completion.

Incredible Families (220 foster children, 106 parents, and 46 siblings served)

- 97% of the parents reported satisfaction with the program and staff
- 98% report being satisfied with their child's progress in the program
- 95% of the parents felt the program helped them with other personal problems not directly related to their children.

President-CEO / Board Chair Letter

When our Vista Hill staff came together for our annual employee service awards in September, we wanted to make sure they knew just how important we believe their work is in improving the lives of those most in need in our community. At that event, we mentioned a quote credited to the late Dr. Martin Luther King that is worth repeating: *“All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence.”*

Our message, which we’d also like to share with you, our supporters, is that we need to look past the numbers of people we serve—27,000 individuals and families last year—to fully understand the tremendous impact Vista Hill is having in San Diego County.

We wanted our staff, which today numbers 550 employees, to take to heart Dr. King’s thought and remember its meaning as we carry out our important jobs in our fields of endeavor. While they

understand that beyond the wonderful and immediate reward that comes with their helping Vista Hill clients every day, there is an even more powerful result of their efforts: the long term and remarkably positive ripple effect that providing critically needed behavioral health, education and social services has on improving our community for many years into the future.

We shared a number of examples of inspiring Vista Hill success stories: the 9-year old boy with severe autism who came to Stein Education Center with extreme behavioral challenges who recently graduated—more than a decade later—to enter the real world as a charming and engaging adult who will contribute to the community. Also the young lady who suffered horrific sexual assault and abuse when she was 12, but thanks to the therapy and coping skills we provided her with, has escaped the fear and shame of what happened and is focused now on creating a stable and productive life for herself.

The cover story of this annual report issue of New Vistas is another reminder of the power of Vista Hill programs. You’ll read on page 2 about how Danielle was about to let alcohol, pills and crystal meth cost her the loss of her baby boy to adoption before she received assistance from several vital Vista Hill programs, each addressing specific issues she was battling. Instead of losing her son and possibly her life, Danielle will graduate from college this month and her future, along with her family, that now includes a daughter, is bright.

What is remarkable is that there are literally thousands of success stories like these playing out every year thanks to Vista Hill. While the general public is not aware of this, and it’s extremely hard to measure the overall impact, we can say with-

out hesitation that our community is much healthier and safer because Vista Hill services intervened and put people’s lives back on track.

As you probably know, people who work in behavioral health, substance use disorders, special education and related fields are often not paid commensurate with the crucial work they do. Fortunately, we have an incredibly dedicated and skilled staff that is motivated by professionalism and an intense commitment to help others escape some of the most challenging problems humans can face. They are honored to carry out the work and extremely proud they are making such a difference.

As we look forward to another year of transforming lives, we want to express our appreciation to our many donors, volunteers and board members whose contributions are essential to Vista Hill’s important mission of building stronger families and brighter futures.



(left to right) Cecil Steppe and Robert Dean along with the entire board work together to carry out Vista Hill’s mission.

Cecil H. Steppe
Chair

Robert Dean
President & CEO

Combined Statement of Financial Position At September 30, 2017 (in 000s)

ASSETS

Current Assets	
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 2,809
Investments	12,718
Accounts Receivable	3,957
Other Current Assets	472
Total Current Assets	19,956
Property, Plant and Equipment, net	9,537
Endowment and Deferred Giving Assets	4,906
Total Assets	\$ 34,399

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Current Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	\$ 522
Accrued Expenses	1,558
Total Current Liabilities	2,080
Mortgage and Notes Payable	1,444
Deferred Rent	399
Total Non-Current Liabilities	1,843
Total Liabilities	3,923
Net Assets	
Unrestricted	26,406
Temporary Restricted	2,189
Permanently Restricted	1,881
Total Net Assets	30,476
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$ 34,399

The financial information in this report represents a condensed version of fiscal year 2016-2017 audited financial statements. A complete set of audited financial statements, with accompanying notes and report from AKT LLP is available at Vista Hill’s main office.

SmartCare Gives Primary Care Providers Access to Behavioral Health Consultation

The physician felt something just wasn't right. As she conducted the annual physical, she suspected her patient was suffering from severe depression. As a general practitioner, however, she felt unqualified to manage the situation.

Unfortunately, in many doctors' offices across the country, that scenario would not have led to the patient receiving mental health assistance. Because of a nationwide surge in demand for behavioral health services, combined with a growing shortage of psychiatric services, millions of Americans are going untreated.

The good news in San Diego County is that the physician was able to pick up the phone and call Vista

Hill's SmartCare Behavioral Health Consultation Services (BHCS) to quickly arrange for a telephone consultation with SmartCare's staff psychiatrist and nurse practitioner. After assessment and referral to a local mental health professional, the patient was diagnosed with depression and was prescribed the appropriate medication to treat it.

In addition to providing consultation and referral services for health care providers, SmartCare BHCS also provides telephone support and consultation for individuals and families who are seeking mental health services on their own. The services, which are funded through the County of San Diego's Behavioral Health Services, are available free of charge to both health care providers and individuals and families of all ages.

"What makes SmartCare BHCS so effective is that it provides providers and patients with a tremendous resource that's not available anywhere else," says Program Manager Deborah Skvarna, LMFT. "Most primary care providers have an average of just seven minutes with each patient, leaving virtually no time to diagnose mental health issues. That's why it's been so valuable for us to

provide them with real-time consultations, referrals and follow up in a very short time frame, which is crucial in helping people who are in crisis."

The initial SmartCare BHCS County contract focused on providing services to children through pediatric consultations. In 2016, the program was expanded to include all primary care providers in

San Diego with consultation and family support services available to youth, teens, adults and older adults.

SmartCare BHCS recently added another service to assist new mothers who may be suffering from postpartum depression. With research showing that up to 15 percent of all women develop postpartum depression, the County asked SmartCare BHCS to conduct a pilot study in which pediatricians at one of Children's Primary Care Medical Group (CPCMG) clinics were provided with a screening tool that helped them determine if their patients might need to be



Front row, from left: Shirley Fett, FNP-BC Triage Clinician, Deborah Skvarna, LMFT Program Manager, Mark Chenven, M.D., Vista Hill Medical Director/Psychiatrist

Back row: Cecilia Valdez, Alyssa Label, LMFT, Renee Evon, LMFT, Carla Hacker, Brianda Jimenez, BA

SMARTCARE BHCS STATS

SmartCare BHCS provided consultations on behalf of approximately 2,665 patients in 2017 with dozens of physician groups and practices enrolled and hundreds of participating providers.

referred to SmartCare BHCS.

The study revealed the screening was extremely effective in identifying women having postpartum issues. The pilot study was so successful, CPCMG decided it was important to expand the screening tool to all 22 of its clinics around the county. Along with the new postpartum program, SmartCare BHCS is now serving dozens of clinics across the county and providing hundreds of referrals each year. The program is increasingly accepted and praised by the health care provider community, including physicians like Hilary M. Bowers, M.D., FAAP, CPCMG's Director of Behavioral and Mental Health Services.

"SmartCare BHCS has been an invaluable resource as Children's Primary Care Medical Group has been able to increase the behavioral and mental health care delivered within primary care," Bowers says. "The ability to have real-time discussions about patient care with child psychiatrists and nurse practitioners decreases wait times for patient outcomes. The staff at SmartCare has been kind, generous and knowledgeable. We look forward to continuing this productive relationship."

Primary care providers can contact the SmartCare BHCS team by calling 858-880-6405. Patients can call the team at 858-956-5900.

"Vista Hill SmartCare BHCS has been helpful in our Postpartum Depression Screening for our patient mothers by allowing us to provide a better integrative mental health system to the families of the newborns under our care, allowing us to provide care that will benefit our patients for years to come."

Aysun Azimi, M.D., Children's Primary Care Medical Group

Vista Hill Therapist is Passionate About Helping Improve Lives

After more than two decades of helping some of the most severely challenged mental health patients, it's hard to believe Vista Hill therapist Deborah Skvarna, LMFT, not only isn't burned out, she's constantly searching for innovative new ways to turn more lives around.

You wouldn't blame Skvarna for showing signs of battle fatigue. After all, during her career she's worked with children who have been sexually abused, the sexual predators themselves, substance abuse patients, domestic violence victims, couples with crumbling marriages and countless clients suffering from the most serious behavioral health issues, including many on the verge of suicide.

The fact that she's never lost her energy or enthusiasm was one of the reasons Skvarna was a perfect choice to serve as program manager of Vista Hill's SmartCare Behavioral Health Consultation Services, which she helped launch five years ago through a contract with the County of San Diego. The program provides mental health consultation services to primary health care providers and their patients throughout San Diego County (see story page 4).

"I'm fortunate because I truly love what I do and I'm always inspired to see clients be so brave and strong to step outside their comfort zones and ask for help," Skvarna says. "It's a privilege to go on a journey with them that often starts in a very painful place but thanks to their courage and resilience and some guidance from us, can help them literally transform their lives. It's extremely rewarding to play a role in that amazing process."

Skvarna isn't sure exactly when she knew she wanted to become a therapist, but she suspects the seeds were sown when she was a young girl growing up in Orange County. She recalls facing a stressful family environment complicated by alcohol abuse and lack of support.

"It wasn't the worst childhood by far, but I remember wishing I had someone to talk to, and I knew there were probably lots of other kids growing up in less-than-rosy circumstances," she

says. "Early on I found myself drawn to the idea of helping people and almost an obligation to go in that direction if I had the opportunity."

Skvarna confirmed that her instincts were correct after she obtained a degree in psychology from San Diego State University and

moved on to California State

University, Fullerton

for her masters. While pursuing her studies she volunteered to help abused children and fell in love with the idea of assisting the underserved from all walks of life.

After getting her degree in 1994, Skvarna worked as a therapist and program director for several non-profits assisting children and adolescents in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. She moved to San Diego in 2000 and went into private practice because she wanted a schedule that allowed her to spend more time raising her three children.

When the Vista Hill position opened in 2013, Skvarna jumped at the opportunity.

"I enjoyed private practice, but I wanted a chance to advocate for those

in need on a larger scale," she says. "I was excited to join Vista Hill because it's one of the most caring, skillful and innovative social service organizations I've ever been associated with. The freedom they give our wonderful team to do our job has been critical to our success."

Skvarna says she is continually inspired by the passion her eight-person staff brings to the job every day.

"We're a relatively small team here at SmartCare BHCS, but every one of us is dedicated to making sure as many people as possible receive the help they need. We're all very proud of the fact that by connecting health care providers and patients with mental health assistance, we're providing a service that's never been available before on this scale. We're especially thrilled to see that it's making a real difference in our community."

I wanted
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on a **larger**
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Deborah Skvarna, Program Manager, SmartCare BHCS, is dedicated to helping patients access behavioral health services.

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A Family's Long Struggle with Autism Highlighted at Mental Health Luncheon

On September 6, 2018 more than 200 guests attended the Vista Hill Council on Mental Health annual luncheon. This year's speaker was Walter Suskind, star of the 2017 Academy Award-nominated documentary, *Life, Animated*, which follows the 20-year journey of his brother's autism. The movie, based on the 2014 best-selling book by his father, Pulitzer Prize-winner Ron Suskind details how Walter and his younger brother, Owen, formed an extraordinary rapport and mutual support system across two decades. Suskind brought along a very special guest, his mother, Cornelia. Together they answered audience questions. The *Life, Animated* movie was shown later that evening at the Stein Education Center. Thanks to the wonderful Council on Mental Health Committee, led by co-chairs Julie Bronstein and Ann Mound, for their tremendous efforts to produce this very successful event. With gratitude, we applaud the luncheon Presenting Sponsors, The Epstein and Bronstein Families, along with the Speaker Sponsor UC San Diego, for their support. The \$30,000 raised at this event will benefit the Stein Education Centers which serve children and adults with autism spectrum disorders, intellectual and developmental disabilities, or severe emotional disturbances by providing individualized educational, recreational, behavioral and vocational training programs.



Michael and Stephanie Epstein, speaker Walter Suskind, Phyllis Epstein and event co-chair, Julie Bronstein along with her husband George.



Leah Hurwitz and Susan Ulevitch are longtime Council on Mental Health patrons.



Jerilyn Jones with event co-chair, Ann Mound, and Julie Jones are all Council on Mental Health members.



Carole Sachs (front row center) hosted a table of friends at the annual luncheon.



Linda Janon, Caryl Lees Witte, Fern Siegel and Mimi Lee are all behavioral health advocates.

STEIN EDUCATION CENTER OUTCOMES – SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

- 139 special education students were enrolled during the 2016-17 school year.
- Special education student progress with Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals: more than 93% of academic goals were fully met or showed significant progress.
- More than 87% of behavioral goals were fully met or showed significant progress.

STEIN EDUCATION CENTER (SEC) ADULT SERVICES OUTCOMES – 2017

- 270 developmentally disabled adults were served.
- SEC adults maintained an overall program attendance rate of 91%. Attendance is an important element for success with volunteering or paid work.
- Parents and care providers rated quality of services at 96% (very satisfied / highly satisfied – top 2 categories), and goal progress at 91%. Overall satisfaction was at 95%.

Cygnnet Theatre Play Explores One Man's Struggle with Depression

Vista Hill, along with NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) San Diego, were proud to be Community Partners for the Cygnnet Theatre production of *Every Brilliant Thing*. The one-man play explores the subject of depression and the lengths we will go to for those we love.

The immersive storytelling experience chronicles the ups and downs of a young man's life journey with a suicidal mother. The play opens with a 7-year-old boy whose mother is in the hospital. Dad says she's "done something stupid." She finds it hard to be happy, so the young boy starts to make a list of everything that's brilliant about the world. Everything worth living for: ice cream, Kung Fu movies, staying up past your bedtime

and being allowed to watch TV, and the color yellow. He left the list on her pillow. He knew she read it because she corrected his spelling. Soon, the list takes on a life of its own.

On September 8, Vista Hill hosted a pre-show ice cream social proving that ice cream is truly the "#1 brilliant thing." After the play, both organizations participated in a special stage chat facilitated by the play's director, Rob Lufty. CEO Robert Dean and Deborah Skvarna, Program Manager of SmartCare BHCS, represented Vista Hill and answered mental health questions around depression and suicide, engaging the patrons in a discussion designed to break down barriers and encourage open dialogue.



(L to R) Cygnnet Theatre's Rob Lufty moderating the stage chat with panelists Robert Dean, Deborah Skvarna and two NAMI San Diego Peer-to-Peer educators.



Vista Hill's "Good Humor Man" Christian Luna and "Softy" Amber Herrmann pose with the *Every Brilliant Thing* poster.

County Names Vista Hill as Live Well San Diego Partner

This fall Vista Hill joined more than 400 other organizations in San Diego County in becoming a *Live Well San Diego* official partner. *Live Well San Diego* is the County's vision of building a healthier, safer region through the pillars of "Building Better Health, Living Safely and Thriving." Alfredo Aguirre, Director of the County's Behavioral Health Services, (pictured center) presents a *Live Well San Diego* plaque to Robert Dean, Vista Hill President and CEO, along with Vista Hill's executive and management team. Vista Hill is proud to become a recognized partner in making San Diego a healthier community, one client, family and employee at a time!



Vista Hill Supporters

Your investment ensures our ability to provide the highest quality programs and services to thousands of families and is imperative to turning lives around.

Dear Friends,

You attend our events, contribute financially, volunteer your time, make in-kind donations and tell your friends and associates about our important work. We hope you know how much we appreciate all you do and how grateful we are for your loyalty and commitment. **We thank and applaud YOU!**

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(L to R) Renée Bannasch, Gayle and Tom Allen, and Carol Fitzgibbons are loyal supporters of Vista Hill.

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"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's no."

- Dr. Seuss, *The Lorax*



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