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Mental Health:

Help for Mothers In Crisis

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When it comes to a little rest and relaxation, it's not unusual to see wealthy celebrities openly talk about routine visits to their therapists to get their heads on straight, or check into rehab for long luxurious vacations in the rolling hills at some distant resort.

But for low income folks, that stigma of mental health services isn't quite so chic.

Given the west side's high unemployment and budget cuts that have made many social services nearly extinct, most residents could justifiably use some of those extra mental health services afforded the rich and famous.

Still, the low income community is always last in line to get help.

When they're ready to go there, Inland Behavioral Health Services provides hand holding to help clients find their way

back to a healthy outlook and sobriety. In many cases, the clinic's mental health treatment is the only alternative for the low income community outside of the county system.

"We are pretty much the go-to place for west side of San Bernardino," said Christine Bierdrager, a clinical psychologist with IBHS. "The great majority that we serve are minority groups that don't normally feel comfortable going to the county facility."

The federally funded program offers help for drug addiction and counseling. Others programs focus on day treatment for pregnant women, and classes for parenting children to five years old.

At the IBHS "E" Street location, Dr. Bierdrager said the moms and two children can receive transportation to and from the facility four days a week, where they can also

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receive substance abuse counseling, health education, and learn coping skills.

Revolving classes can accommodate 16 women per session, but the door is always open for more, she said.

"It's specifically for pregnant women or women who are single parents and have young children," she said. "Once you complete the program, it's pretty intensive; you're really set to move on."

Substance abuse outpatient programs are also available, she said. Their program also accommodates single dads.

Between both locations, the "E" street facility and the sister "D" Street clinic in San Bernardino, patients can access a full range of low cost or free primary care, dental services, prescriptions, mental health support, rehabilitation and homeless support services.

Sweet Dreams, Women and Children's Shelter of the Time for Change Foundation, also works with Inland Behavioral Health Services, as well as with a number of other agencies to help women in transition.

Zaheva Knowles, the Foundation's spokesperson, said that especially now with soaring Inland Empire unemployment, it's important to support services that help the women find their place back to a stable environment.

Next month, the group will host a baby shower for one pregnant mom at the shelter, and is calling on the community to come out to support the event with donations of diapers and

shoes for several other children at the shelter. The shoes are needed for infants and children from 18 months to seven years old.

The event, to be held November 8, will take place from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Participants are encouraged to contact the office, or gifts can be dropped off at 1255 E. Highland Avenue, #211, in San Bernardino.

"If you bring a bag of diapers, you will automatically be entered into a raffle," she said, adding that there will be lots of great prizes.

Knowles said the Foundation's residential home for women without children is working toward sobriety and life skills. The Sweet Dreams Shelter currently houses six women and their children at any given time.

The program also works with the African American Health Institute, which provides a number of free health resources and screenings.

"Most of these women are homeless, and many are struggling with drug addiction and substance abuse, some of them have been in and out of prison and have lost their kids. We work with them," Knowles said.

To call for more information on shoes, diapers and clothing sizes for the Sweet Dreams Shelter event, call 909-886-2994.

For more information on IBHS free and low cost health care and mental health services, call 909.881.6146.