Inclusion is Highest Priority

As we recognize LGBT+ and Pride month in June, we reflect on mental health disparities that still exist due to societal stigma, discrimination, and exclusion. Pro Bono Counseling Project (PBCP) is committed to creating a positive inclusive environment embracing diversity, engagement, and belonging. We continue to review our procedures and processes to work toward that goal.

From the moment someone contacts PBCP, staff members strive to ensure that callers feel comfortable. The team is very well aware that reaching out is extremely challenging and they want to put callers at ease. And that starts with what may seem like a few simple questions, but can go a long way to making someone feel at ease, included, and understood.

For example, one of the first things a caller is asked is how they would like to be referred to, not just their first name, but also if they would like to share their pronouns. A staff member will reciprocate and share their pronouns and if appropriate provide an example of usage.

We also ask how many people are in the client’s household and the relationship of the other household members to the client, rather than asking about marital status specifically.

When inquiring about gender, we ask, “How do you identify your gender?” and we have an opportunity to fill in the blank rather than requiring the client to select from a narrow list of options.

“Our staff members understand that the phrasing of these questions is critical and should be delivered in a compassionate manner,” explains PBCP Clinical Director Sherri Bloom. “Our highest priority is to safeguard an inclusive environment.”

Finally, we ask the client what their preferences are for a therapist, which may or may not include gender, race, style, or specialty. This is often a time when clients request a clinician who identifies with a specific gender or sexuality, or who is LGBT+ affirming.

Two New Members Join Pro Bono Counseling Project Board

Pro Bono Counseling Project (PBCP), announces the appointment of two new members to its Board of Directors: Roxanne Melgar, LCSW-C, and Kimya Nuru Dennis, PhD.

“It is a pleasure to welcome these new members to the Pro Bono Counseling board,” stated PBCP Board President Gilbert Bliss. “We will benefit greatly from their experience and dedication to the community as we work to meet the mental health care needs of Maryland residents and achieve Pro Bono Counseling’s short and long-term strategic priorities.”

Kimya Nuru Dennis, PhD, is an activist, sociologist and criminologist, educator, evaluator, and researcher. As founder and owner of 365 Diversity, Dr. Dennis provides results-based services for decision makers in schools, businesses, and organizations that include medical health and suicide prevention organizations and facilities. Emphasis is placed on identities and experiences shaping every aspect of people’s lives and how people are treated. A range of demographics and cultures captured consist of religion and spirituality, race and ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, language and communication, mental health, physical health, disability, reproductive decisions, and sexuality.

“I joined the board of directors because Pro Bono Counseling is intentionally increasing demographically and culturally inclusive resources and services,” stated Dennis. “It is important for all medical and health students, professionals, organizations, and facilities to stop using the false and harmful ‘one size fits all’ approach to mental health, physical health, substance use, suicide and suicidal self-harm, and inward and outward expressions of aggression and violence.”

Roxanne Melgar, LCSW-C, is a clinical social worker with over 25 years of experience providing direct services to survivors of Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence. For the last 15 years, Ms. Melgar has held the position of Clinical Director at TurnAround Inc, providing oversight of all clinical services including intake coordination and providing direct supervision to all clinical staff. Ms. Melgar is bilingual/bicultural and is a primary resource in the community for Spanish speaking survivors.

“I first became a volunteer clinician with Pro Bono Counseling over 15 years ago,” stated Melgar. “I’m excited for this opportunity because I believe in Pro Bono Counseling’s mission and want to contribute to its success whichever way I can.”

30 Days of Giving Fundraiser

Have you heard? Pro Bono Counseling Project is turning 30! And to celebrate we are kicking off a year-long celebration with our 30 DAYS OF GIVING FUNDRAISER.

Pro Bono Counseling has thrived and grown, helping thousands of people over the last 30 years, thanks to partnerships with volunteers, donors, foundations, community organizations, and community members like you.

Help us continue to connect Maryland residents with the mental health care they need. Please consider giving $30 or more during the month of June 2021.

Visit ProBonoCounseling.org to give online or send check made payable to Pro Bono Counseling Project to: PBCP 5900 Metro Drive Baltimore, MD 21215

Make a mental health connection – Give Today!