The Sixth Annual MENDing Poverty Conference was held on June 13, 2013 at the MEND Center in Pacoima and was hosted by MEND and Valley Nonprofit Resources. The conference theme was “Healthcare Reform for Low-Income Individuals: Included or Invisible?” The conference also addressed the fundamental roles of nonprofits serving people and families living in poverty. Among the speakers were California Endowment CEO Dr. Robert Ross, Director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Dr. Jonathan Fielding, and HealthNet Medicaid/Medical Compliance executive Jason Che. Associate Director of Vision y Compromiso Melinda Cordero-Barzaga, received the 2013 MENDing Poverty Nonprofit Leadership Award because of her work and leadership in the Los Angeles nonprofit sector. Retiring Los Angeles City Councilmember Richard Alarcon was also honored for his long-term commitment to anti-poverty initiatives and his support of our annual conference. Approximately 200 nonprofit executives and program managers from poverty agencies throughout Los Angeles participated in the plenary sessions and workshops.

2013 ANNUAL REPORT COMMITTEE
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MISSION: WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT, POWERED BY VOLUNTEERS, MEND’S MISSION IS TO BREAK THE BONDS OF POVERTY BY PROVIDING BASIC HUMAN NEEDS AND A PATHWAY TO SELF-RELIANCE.
VISION: ALL MEMBERS OF OUR COMMUNITY LIVING IN POVERTY ATTAIN SELF-RELIANCE AND CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIETY AS CARING HUMAN BEINGS.
A few years ago Xavier Guillen thought it would be a good idea to lose weight. But unlike many entering middle age, it wasn’t a sudden, sideways glance into a mirror that motivated him. “My glucose level was off the charts,” says Guillen, 47, a former prison inmate who now works as a volunteer at the San Fernando Valley Gentleman Beauty Salon in North Hollywood. “I thought about it but then I realized I had to do something about it.”

Four years later, Guillen is still at it. “It’s a lifestyle thing,” he says good-naturedly. “Every time I dispense drugs, they give me the kind of health I’ve been trying to achieve.”

Guillen started taking insulin for five years before going to Mend’s Medical Clinic in 2006. “The lab work came back and the doctors told me I needed a healthier lifestyle,” says Guillen. “They kind of picked on me.”

Just as important were the services the clinic offered, particularly a nutrition class that played a significant part in Xavier losing eighty pounds in three years. “I had a terrible diet,” he says. “Pizza, donuts, frozen burritos. I wanted to change and the course helped me do a great deal.”

The dramatic weight loss paid off. Xavier no longer needs insulin and recently began taking less powerful medication to control his diabetes. Although the decision to lead a healthier life was ultimately his, Xavier says Mend deserves much of the credit. “I could not have done it without Mend.”

Feliciano Moses Lerma

Feliciano Moses Lerma feels confident enough to go on his 80th birthday. He has a full-time job, feels “fantastic,” and his energy is contagious. There was a time, however, when Feliciano had nothing.

After serving 20 years in prison, he came out with no home, no money and no teeth. In prison they pulled his bad teeth.

Feliciano had no option but to live on skid row. He had no food, no shelter and his health was poor.

A parole officer finally helped place him in a shared room just a few blocks from Mend. “I thank God because he is the one that directs my life,” says Feliciano. “He is my Mother.”

Feliciano received food and clothes from Mend. He was also given new teeth. Mend’s free Dental Clinic is staffed by volunteer dentists and dental professionals that provide essential dental care for those in our community who are uninsured and cannot afford to pay for healthcare.

Feliciano says that, after recovering dentures, his health improved dramatically because he could eat again. He was also getting nutritious food. “The dental, clothing, nutrition made me feel human again. I could finally smile,” he says.

Feliciano felt confident enough to go on job interviews and today has a full-time job he loves. He manages 52 inmates and has his own apartment and car. “I wanted to take control of my life,” he says. “It was time. But I couldn’t have done it without Mend.”

LEADERSHIP LETTER

MEND’s Health Clinic has grown dramatically in recent years, both in the numbers of uninsured, low-income patients treated, as well as in the quality and scope of our Clinic services. This is largely due to collaborations with universities, hospitals, and health organizations that have partnered with our staff and core clinic volunteers. With MEND’s holistic approach, patients can receive medical, vision and dental services, counseling, and health education, all under one roof.

But beyond helping our patients feel better, MEND workers understand that good health fits into our agency’s mission to “provide pathways to self-reliance.” For example, a child living in poverty with poor vision will do much better in school if he can obtain free glasses. An unemployed adult can go to interviews with confidence and has a better chance at employment if missing and broken teeth are replaced. Someone with diabetes or other medical issues will miss less work and has a better chance of keeping a job if health conditions are managed with medication, exercise and good diet.

In fact, much of our work in 2013 was spent in giving focus to what it means for MEND to “provide pathways to self-reliance.” During the first six months, our Boards, subject matter experts, and staff worked diligently on the development of a new 2013-2016 strategic plan. Two signature program initiatives came out of this planning process, both of which were started in the fall.

The first is “UNending Poverty: 1000 Clients Job Ready”, which is an effort to expand and strengthen MEND’s job training programs and other services that support employment readiness. The second is the launch of a comprehensive database called “Efforts to Outcomes” that will allow us to track clients’ progress toward self-sufficiency.

Looking back on 2013, there was strong evidence that when individuals and organizations from all sectors of our community come together, we can truly move people out of poverty, and out of reliance. It’s our privilege to work on behalf of our thousands of volunteers, partnering organizations, and our financial and in-kind donors for making the MEND mission a reality.

2013 MEND PROGRAM STATISTICS

Total of all volunteers (unduplicated) 5,225
Total of new volunteers 4,023
Total volunteer hours 172,609
Emergency Food Department
Total encounters (MEND + Outreach) 234,227
Total volunteer hours 40,771
Home Garden Training
Total volunteer hours 72
Total volunteer hours 2,034
Clothing Center
Total encounters (MEND + Outreach) 168,196
Total volunteer hours 31,207
Christmas Program
Total volunteer hours 5,329
Total volunteer hours 11,122
Medical and Vision Clinics
Total medical encounters 6,040
Total vision encounters 1,429
Total volunteer hours 15,413
Dental Clinic
Total encounters 5,314
Total volunteer hours 16,313
Home Visiting
Total encounters 1,578
Total volunteer hours 703
Education & Training Center
Adult Language Students
Total students 607
Total volunteer hours 9,824
Computer Lab
Total students 287
Total volunteer hours 3,052
Youth Services
Total students 100
Total volunteer hours 4,264
Sewing
Total students 54
Total volunteer hours 1,270
Homeless Showers
Total encounters 1,411
Total volunteer hours 527
Job Skills Training Program
Total participants 1,081
Office (Recipient/Administration/Volunteer Services)
Total volunteer hours 31,134
Board of Directors/Committee
Total volunteer hours 4,875

Pictured from left: Jenny Guillerme, MPH, Chief Executive Officer; Marianne Haver NB, MS President and CEO; Maritza Recinos, GPA Chair, MEND Program Board; Susan Blumenfeld, DSH Chair, MEND Governing Board; California Community Foundation President & CEO, Susan Blumenfield; and the Honorable Ze’ev Yaroslavsky, Chair, MEND Governing Board.