

## Wellness Centers

*Summarized by Thomas T. Thomas*

A sometimes-hidden gem among county services are the Wellness Centers or Hubs. Scattered throughout the county are six sites which offer welcoming, accessible, and supportive community spaces for individuals with a wide range of mental health needs. The sites have the goals of building community, encouraging independent skills, and providing support through groups and activities.

Bay Area Community Services (BACS, [www.bayareacs.org](http://www.bayareacs.org)) offers four hubs: Towne House in Oakland, Hedco in Hayward, South County in Fremont, and Valley in Pleasanton. Bonita House ([www.bonitahouse.org](http://www.bonitahouse.org)) has two sites: the Berkeley Wellness Center on University Avenue, and Casa Ubuntu Creative Wellness Center at the Eastmont Mall.

At the speaker meeting on November 16, we heard from **Jimisha Baker**, Director of Housing, and **Clarise Burton**, Program Manager at Towne House, both with BACS, and from **LeAnne Rozner, LMFT**, Director of the Berkeley Wellness Center, with Bonita House.

BACS was established in 1953 and has spread throughout the Bay Area and much of California. It offers housing services in Alameda, Contra Costa, and now in Monterey County. The organization has integrated many of its services into its four Wellness Centers, which have become entry points for people underserved in other systems and at risk for homelessness. The goal of each Wellness Center is building social connections, and it offers services on the concierge model.

According to Jimisha Baker, these centers serve individuals in Alameda County who are either receiving behavioral health services or need them and experiencing housing instability or homelessness. The menu of services includes:

- **Housing support**, with personal assessment, problem solving, housing readiness, barrier removal, and access to affordable housing.
- **Holistic support**, including symptom management, medication support, immunization services, access to donated shoes and clothing. (BACS has partnerships with organizations that provide donations of food and clothing.) The Fremont center also offers showers and a self-service laundry to some 2,000 partners.
- **Therapeutic services** in support of the partner's behavioral health.
- **Employment support**, including help with job applications, resumes, interview preparation, barrier removal, access to employment openings, and education.
- **Nutrition support**, with breakfast and lunch services, snacks, hot and cold beverages, and food parties. The four centers serve some 3,000 meals a month.
- **Social connection**, including outings, peer events, peer-led groups, holiday celebrations, and cultural activities.

“We provide monthly activities,” Clarise Burton said, “but mostly we are a safe place for people to come and just be.” In addition to breakfast and lunch and

therapeutic wellness groups, the centers provide creative activities and cultural awareness. Partners are encouraged to take pride in and take ownership of the programs. “We want them to be part of the process,” she said.

The centers are open Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 5 pm. Participation is by drop-in with no reservation needed. The site addresses are:

- Towne House Wellness Center, 629 Oakland Avenue, Oakland, 510-658-9480.
- Hedco Wellness Center, 590 B Street, Hayward, 510-247-8235.
- South County Wellness Center, 40965 Grimmer Boulevard, Fremont, 510-657-7425.
- Valley Wellness Center, 3900 Valley Avenue, Suite B, Pleasanton, 925-484-8457.

Most of the sites are accessible by public transit. BACS does not provide pickup and dropoff transportation services, but if a partner needs to get somewhere they may be able to ride with the van.

Bonita House’s two Wellness Centers offer peer support and peer-run therapeutic groups, as well as a regular schedule of programs including art therapy, creative expression, and mindfulness. Because Bonita House is a dual-diagnosis residence facility, its Casa Ubuntu center also hosts Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

“The wellness centers are a place you can come and be treated like a human being,” LeAnne Rozner said. “We take care of each other. And we also have the friendliest Scrabble game in town.”

The two centers also operate Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 5 pm, and the process begins with a morning self-checkin. The site addresses are:

- Berkeley Wellness Center, 1909 University Avenue, Berkeley, 510-809-3004.
- Casa Ubuntu Creative Wellness Center, Eastmont Town Center, 7200 Bancroft Avenue, Oakland, 510-735-0864.

**Q. Do you have any eligibility requirements?**

A. There are no requirements for either program; that is, you don’t have to be a client of county services. But for BACS to provide housing support, you have to apply at the wellness center nearest to where you are experiencing homelessness.

**Q. What is the age range?**

A. At BACS, the centers see mostly people aged 25 and older. Not many in the range 18 to 25 come in.

**Q. How does BACS deal with substance abuse?**

A. The centers deal with both behavioral health and substance abuse, mostly marijuana but occasionally harder drugs. BACS can help people get referrals to services and resources.

**Q. What happened to the Wellness Centers during the pandemic?**

The BACS centers had to close their doors during the pandemic restrictions—but they could offer services at the front door or on the lawn. Sometimes they resorted to tents. One of the big changes due to the pandemic, BACS started offering housing services through the Wellness Centers, as one-stop support.

**Q. Do the centers offer anything for families?**

With partner consent, the centers can involve families as well as board-and-care operators. Bonita House runs a program for clients who have children with mental health issues.