

## **Los Amigos Project**

Supportive Transitional Housing – Sponsored by Southwest Counseling  
In partnership with the Community Service Corps (CSC)  
Executive Summary

It has often been observed that the largest mental health facility in the United States is the system of incarceration. That system encompasses local, state, and federal facilities and comprises the largest population of incarcerated individuals, by country, in the world. Many of these individuals enter incarceration with a co-occurring condition – substance use disorder and a mental illness. In fact, these individuals frequently self-medicate in their trauma and mental distress with drugs and alcohol. Incarceration often does not improve the inmate's mental illness and can exacerbate it. The fact that New Mexico has one of the highest recidivism rates in the nation and has also been hit hard by the opioid crises, has led to this proposal.

The target population of this proposal includes but is not exclusive to those being released from incarceration. We can also treat individuals already living in the community and encompass a cohort with Serious Mental Illness (SMI) category. This cohort has a poorer prognosis for success and require more intensive and sustained interventions. Motivation for government to fund this project is safety for the client as well as public safety, because an individual with this support is less likely to recidivate, go into crisis, or commit another crime if their life is stable. One motivation for the individual to succeed is to avoid reincarceration. Public safety, as well as safety for this highly vulnerable cohort, the need to mitigate against the opioid crises, and the need for family reunification are some of the primary motivations for this project.

This model relies on the research and best practices developed over the past 35 years by the judiciary to best serve this population. For cross-sector collaboration Los Amigos coaches will:

- Determine if co-morbidity exists (physical, addiction and/or mental health issues), facilitate behavioral health services (including psychiatric and addiction medications such as buprenorphine, methadone and naltrexone), monitor behavior, provide guidance and supervision, and ensure compliance with all medical directives to see that clients meet their responsibilities; all clients must remain drug and alcohol free.
- Engage the client in identifying and changing patterns of behavior that have not served them well and assist them in developing new and effective behaviors.
- Provide on-site assistance re-establishing their place in the community. Such assistance could include, but is not limited to life skills training, relationship building, restoring driver's licenses or ID cards, enrolling in a health insurance plan, and potentially, finding gainful employment.
- Assist the client in determining and obtaining appropriate long-term housing placement following their stay at Los Amigos as well as helping them identify and understand the need for a long-term, personal community of support.

In short, with a safe, secure place to live and on-site, 24/7 professional services, Los Amigos seeks to optimize the chances for these individuals to recover from drug addiction, successfully treat any behavioral and/or mental health issues, re-enter their families and the community as a whole, and become thriving and productive members of society. The typical stay with Los Amigos will be overnight to twelve months and the decision of when to exit will be a joint decision by the client, their coach and their network of support working in the best interest of the client. The project is a 32-bed facility with separate structures for male and female.

This program will partner with intersectional agencies in an effort to be responsive to the client's needs. Such agencies include county, city, and state agencies, the judiciary, health and behavioral health providers, etc. The cost savings of this model are profound. The low-cost estimate for an Emergency Medical Technician in our area for one hour is \$225. The cost per person, per day at Los Amigos is \$115.21 and of that \$14.23 is covered by Medicaid. A similar project, The Second Chance Center in Aurora, was started in 2012 and has reduced the recidivism rate by 80%. Los Amigos makes sense morally, therapeutically, statistically, and financially.