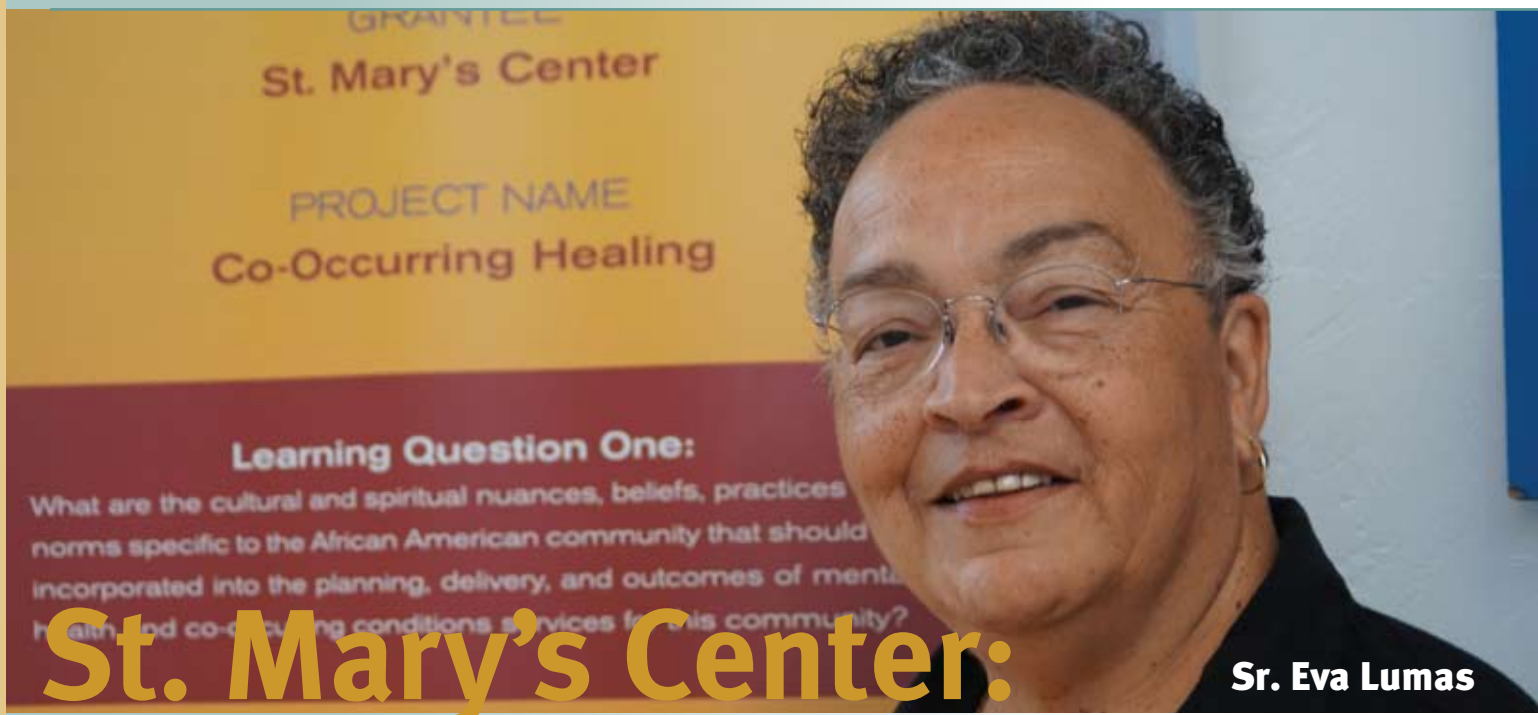


St. Mary's Center, a community of healing, hope and justice in the heart of Oakland, provides comprehensive services to vulnerable and homeless elders and to preschool children. We promote self-reliance and leadership development with our participants.



Touching Lives

Transforming Lives | Building Community | Creating Change



St. Mary's Center:

Sr. Eva Lumas

Creating Healing Environments for African Americans

St. Mary's Center believes that creating environments where people who have experienced oppression and cultural alienation feel safe, seen and listened to is at the heart of healing. The "See Me, Hear Me" curriculum developed by Sister Eva Lumas, SMC staff member, guided by the experience and wisdom of our seniors, is the culmination of an 18 month project to identify and incorporate cultural characteristics significant to African American seniors into health care services so that they will be better served.

The curriculum grew out of the ethos of respect and collaboration so prevalent at St. Mary's Center. "I am a person not a diagnosis" is more than a fine distinction at St. Mary's Center. In Alameda County, African-Americans experience the poorest results in mental health care. Wanting to change the status quo and learn approaches that work, St. Mary's Center turned to African-American elders and utilized Healing Circles and a Black Learning Style¹ (defined by Dr. Janice E. Hale) to get the conversation going and help develop a curriculum other organizations can use to improve their individual programs.

Twenty St. Mary's Center elders participated in a process to uncover cultural and spiritual influences that contribute to self-awareness and renewal. Initial conversations focused on the culture of violence and prison in the African-American community. Yet the conversation moved from blame and disassociation to articulating characteristics that exemplify strengths and values of their culture. Sister Eva revealed that through this process

"Many participants for the first time heard and embraced the strength, breadth and positive power of African American culture. It's much greater than what our seniors have experienced: poverty, drugs and broken lives." (continued on page 3)

¹A relational learning style that is highly auditory, interactive, collaborative, reality-based and creative. Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services. Innovation: St. Mary's Center Co-Occurring Healing pamphlet 2014



Letter from the Director

Dear Friends,

This year when we opened our Winter Shelter, for the first time, all of our beds were filled within two hours. Our work continues to be vital and community support is the key to our success!

Thank you for all your help, whether you cooked dinner for the shelter or one of our Sunday Dinners, brought presents for a neighborhood family, made a financial contribution, or volunteered at the Preschool. **Your support and encouragement inspires all of us at St. Mary's Center.**

Our Gala last fall was the biggest ever. Together we raised \$170,000 so that essential services are not compromised for the elders and children who need them. A special thank you to all of our sponsors, businesses and guests who made this possible.

Our year-end celebrations show the strength of our community. Over 1,000 children had a special gift under the tree, Santa came to visit "children of all ages", there were special parties, a senior talent show, a wonderful Kwanzaa celebration and so much more. Thank you to all of the individuals, parishes and groups that helped to create such a special Holiday season.

The financial support we receive from you is such a blessing to the families and elders who see their life change here. It is a place where they grow, get healthy, feel the care of others and begin to imagine a different future. Thank you!

One of Nelson Mandela's quotes resonates with me when I think about all of the challenges we face and hope we inspire. "It always seems impossible until it is done."

Thank you for being part of it all!

Carol Johnson
Executive Director



Creating Healing Environments for African Americans (continued from page 1)

One senior said, "I am more than a recovering addict, I am part of a healthy community." This sentiment is why so many members feel their own health has improved since coming to St. Mary's Center. Another senior put it this way, "We are known here. "They will come look for you if you are not here for a while."

Sister Eva Lumas reflected, "You can see people grow in stature before your eyes when they really see - there is nothing wrong with me - when they embrace themselves and see they still have time to offer their gifts."

This project has increased cultural awareness at St. Mary's Center and is the catalyst for developing our Council of Elders and a partnership with the Bay Area Association of Black Psychologists to pilot Emotional Emancipation Circles. In February, St. Mary's staff and seniors presented the findings and curriculum of the "See Me, Hear Me" project to Alameda County and agencies throughout the area. At St. Mary's Center the "experts" are the very people served by the program. We are grateful to our donors and Alameda County for this Innovation Grant so we could highlight the wisdom of elders to the benefit of African-Americans throughout Alameda County.

Standing Together for Hope and Justice



Most St. Mary's Center seniors live on an SSI check of \$877 a month, well down from 2008 levels of \$907. While the additional \$30 may not seem like much, to a person with a small income it could mean food for a week. Hope & Justice volunteers from St. Mary's Center spoke eloquently at recent legislative hearings in Sacramento to restore these cuts to SSI.

Guitar Whitfield, a Hope & Justice participant remarked about the trip that "It was an opportunity to speak for the people who were unable to speak for themselves. I was impressed with the folks in wheelchairs who came to speak for themselves, and what it must have took for them to get to Sacramento."

Advocates for Hope and Justice, an active peer-led group of seniors, is a cornerstone program of St. Mary's Center. From the very beginning, St. Mary's envisioned that vulnerable seniors would not only be helped, but would also advocate on their own behalf, thereby strengthening themselves and helping others.





Sarah Ross, Early Childhood Mental Health Specialist



Quinetta Lewis, Preschool Director

St. Mary's Center Partners with Jewish Family Services

Two days each week, Sarah Ross, a Psychologist with Jewish Family Services, is in the classroom and play-yard of St. Mary's Center Preschool to support and guide the teachers in responding to children with challenges. As a former preschool teacher, she is keenly aware of child development issues and strategies to address concerns and positively impact health.

Sarah Ross is the direct result of a partnership between St. Mary's Center Preschool and Jewish Family Services to provide early childhood mental health services to poor communities. Preschool Director Quinetta Lewis explains, "Many of our children live in violent neighborhoods, come from single parent households or live with someone other than a parent. Some have emotional outbursts that disrupt the classroom and signals the child needs attention. Now we have help to turn these situations into a learning experience for all of us."

Sarah's professional guidance extends beyond helping teachers and children navigate classroom experiences. A number of our preschool children come from very chaotic circumstances and may suffer from trauma, hyperactivity or a sensory integration disorder, for example, and need ongoing professional help. **The good news is that for many issues that surface in childhood, early intervention can make a critical difference in a child's recovery and future health.** The challenge is that while resources are available to treat low-income families, there is usually a significant waiting list. Sarah helps St. Mary's Center families navigate the system by providing the most appropriate referrals and letting them know what they can expect in terms of treatment. Everyone at St. Mary's Preschool is benefitting from her expertise.

We are very grateful to Jewish Family Services for extending our reach with children!

A Profile of Jose

A few years ago, Jose painted "The Awakening" an evocative portrait of a face with bright wide-open eyes, much like his own when he's talking about his most recent passion – publicizing the power of St. Mary's Center to vastly improve the lives of vulnerable seniors.

Now 70 years old, he goes to the Commonwealth Club to seek information and conversation about issues facing seniors and the model that he says saved his life - St. Mary's Center.

"I want to publish what we do here - have people come to meet the people. It would be an avenue not even travelled."

Jose's goal is to help students of social work understand how change happens. "I am truly a miracle. I did not believe in God or the devil. **I was mentally ill and in prison for 35 - 40 years of my life. I had never met nice people before coming to St. Mary's Center.**

I knew the Doctor here at the time from when I was in Atascadero and San Quentin - he would come and sit with me here for lunch. I found art therapy - I thought art was for sissies but it is a way for me to use both sides of my brain. It is my hobby - when I am mad or sad that is what I do."

"I am secure and independent. This model works - it works so much we don't leave. I want to help convince and educate about this potential for change. I want to change the misconceptions of who is poor. It is like the women's plight - some see us as a nuisance - we pay taxes too. The middle class don't see it but they have one foot on the banana peel, one check away and they could be going down - come to St. Mary's Center and get well. People need a hand - give a hand."

Jose takes his lead from one of his favorite authors, Thomas Merton, who wrote "You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope."





A Profile of Francis

The day that Francis was released from San Quentin he headed for St. Mary's Center. He knew that his life had to change and he knew a little bit about St. Mary's Center. Born and raised in Hawaii, a nomad from the age of 14, Francis hopped freight cars all over the U.S., worked as a commercial fisherman in Alaska for a number of years, and lived on the Mohawk Reservation in upstate New York. Gradually alcohol and gambling took over his life.

Six years ago, he walked into St. Mary's Center. According to Francis these last six years have been his happiest in more than 30 years. He credits his close relationship with his case managers for helping him get and stay on the right track. The programs at St. Mary's Center made a huge difference too, especially our "one-stop shop" approach where all services are easily accessed in one place. Gradually with the help of St. Mary's Center Francis obtained an apartment, a bicycle, savings, and as he calls it, "a tamed-down life." Most importantly he was able to re-connect with his daughter and grandchildren.

Like everyone, Francis still has times when anger and frustration threaten to overwhelm him, but now he knows to make an appointment with his case manager and talk it through. He calls them his "sounding board."

Today, Francis is knee-deep in dirt and dreams. He is working on a project in his East Oakland neighborhood that utilizes his abilities as horticulturalist, carpenter, teacher and elder. The "Homefulness Project" is turning an empty lot into a permaculture garden and straw bale homes for mothers with children.

He is very grateful to those he calls the "benefactors" of St. Mary's and others who have helped him along the way. **Remembering what the worker at Social Security said when he told him some years ago that he was part of St. Mary's Center, "You hang out with those women and you are going to change."** Francis still likes to hop a freight car occasionally, but now it's a vacation, not his life.

The War at Home: St. Mary's Center Veterans Project

It is estimated that 40% of homeless men are veterans, so a key strategy to ending homelessness is finding a home for every homeless veteran.¹ St. Mary's Center, as part of a national initiative announced by Pres. Obama, began a project last fall to help homeless older Vets suffering from addiction, other serious health issues and the lingering effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) stabilize their lives and find and maintain housing.

For veterans with PTSD, what we think of as normal life: maintaining a house, a job, and relationships are particularly difficult. Cal Hobday, a St. Mary's Center senior and Vet remembers, "The Vietnam Veterans were never welcomed home - they had a hard time blending in, they had PTSD and alcohol issues. The family disintegrated and they were left on their own."

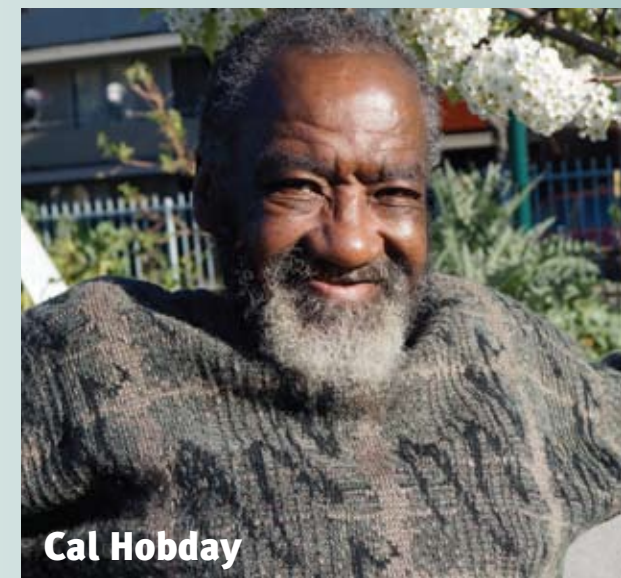
Funded by our donors and a grant from the Veterans Administration, St. Mary's Center case managers provide comprehensive mental health services that include recovery programs, psychiatric care, medication monitoring, anger management strategies and money management as well as working with Vets to find affordable housing, with temporary financial assistance.

Finding housing that is affordable for most of St. Mary's veterans is no easy feat. Executive Director Carol Johnson explains, "Many veterans are on SSI (Supplemental Security Income) and get \$877/month - there is no decent housing for them. Even single room occupancy hotels with the bathroom down the hall charge \$600/month." Unfortunately, what HUD describes as a worst-case scenario, paying more than 50% of a tiny income in housing, is often for St. Mary's seniors a best-case scenario."

"Those who have served our nation should never find themselves on the streets, living without hope." This statement from United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki acknowledges a growing reality for thousands of veterans who do not have a place to live or the services they need to "survive" at home. Charged with changing these statistics, Shinseki has enlisted the help of 300 community groups across the country to house and support veterans to end this epidemic. St. Mary's is proud to be one of them.

Milas Hackett, a Korean War veteran and elder at St. Mary's remembers, "When I was in the military I met some really brave people." St. Mary's Center stands with our veterans and all extremely low income people who are bravely working to change their lives.

¹ National Coalition on the Homeless, Homeless Veterans Fact Sheet, www.nationalhomeless.org



Cal Hobday

"The Vietnam Veterans were never welcomed home - they had a hard time blending in, they had PTSD and alcohol issues."



Milas Hackett

"When I was in the military I met some really brave people."



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St. Mary's Center has received Charity Navigator's highest recognition. Charity Navigator is America's leading independent charity evaluator and assesses the Financial Health and Accountability and Transparency of nonprofit organizations.

A new generation of supporters!

Our donors come in all shapes, sizes and ages and we are glad they do! Meilin (9), Emiko (10) and Samia (11) made goodies for a bake sale and raised \$200 for St. Mary's Center. Their example is a reminder to all of us about ways to make a difference. Thanks girls and to Park Day School for introducing so many students to the mission of St. Mary's Center.

Thank you to all of the students who help to serve meals at St. Mary's Center. We know the experience brightens the day of the elders and grows our collective awareness about each other. Special thanks to students from Corpus Christi School (pictured here), Park Day School and others for giving a helping hand!

