San Francisco’s mental health safety net

WE ARE brave.
WE ARE hopeful.
WE ARE resilient.
WE ARE San Francisco.

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Message to Our Community

In 2020 Access Institute faced the greatest challenge in its 18-year history. Our plans for the year, including new program initiatives, were dramatically interrupted in March with the emergence of the COVID-19 crisis. The “Shelter in Place” order and its economic and emotional impacts had immediate and serious consequences for the hundreds of people we serve. Approximately 85% lost their jobs, lost income, or someone in their household lost employment or income. Many of the rest continued working, but, in low-wage jobs where they were exposed to the virus on a daily basis. The impacts on the psychological and emotional health of our patients were dramatic and included increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Our first priority was maintaining their vital connection to support at Access Institute.

Next, we augmented services to meet the most acute needs. We eliminated fees for those who lost jobs due to the pandemic. We provided additional sessions of individual therapy and crisis service. We added case management services to assist in applications for health insurance; unemployment benefits; grants; and other social supports; and we created an on-line support group to help address specific stresses caused by the pandemic.

In response to school closures, our In-School Mental Health Program shifted from on-site therapy to more expansive support for families. Therapists worked overtime to reach out and connect to families and children via telephone and video chat. Even in the best of times these families endure tremendous stress, so providing them with advice, support, and connection to resources was critical to maintaining their emotional stability. Similarly, the seniors we serve through our partnership with the Bayview Hunter’s Point Adult Day Health Center (ADHC), needed the support of our therapists more than ever as the ADHC closed and the seniors were sent home, often to extreme isolation. We are pleased to report that we were able to serve all of them through phone and video technology.

Finally, we worked throughout the year to advocate for a psychologically healthy response to the COVID-19 crisis and encouraged everyone to pay attention to their levels of stress, monitor signs of anxiety and depression, find connection, and practice self-care. We provided community-wide advice and support through emails, blog and social media posts. We continually updated our website with essential resources and sources of support.

We are tremendously grateful for the support of our community. We truly did get through this crisis together. While we mourn the many losses that occurred in 2020, we remain hopeful that Access Institute and its community of volunteers, donors, psychology interns, postgraduate fellows, staff, faculty, supervisors, board members and alumni will all emerge with greater resilience.

Bart Magee, Ph.D.
Founder and Executive Director
Measuring an Unusual Year

Like the many aspects of our work that have had to adapt over the past 12-months, so has the way we’ve collected data to give you a sense of the year we’ve had. This year, we’ve asked our team to share the impacts the pandemic has had on their work and them personally.

As we reflect on the challenges we’ve faced, we also acknowledge the progress and accomplishments we made to respond to the critical needs of our community as promptly and comprehensively as we could.

We hope you enjoy this opportunity to get to know our staff and trainees, and their work, more intimately than ever before.

At Our Clinic

- 537 individuals and couples received treatment at our Hayes Valley Clinic in 2020
- 79% of patients at the clinic are in individual treatment. The rest are in couple, family or child treatment, or are receiving Clinical Case Management (ASAP) services.
- 90% of patients are low-income and more than half of those are extremely low-income.
- 85% of patients have experienced COVID-related economic impacts like loss of a job/income or a family member lost a job/income
- 58% of patients report experiencing moderate to severe levels of depression and associated symptoms.
- 33% of patients have histories of serious suicidal thinking or past attempts.

Our Adapted Services

Psychotherapy
Provided remote therapy for adolescents, adults, couples, and families. A minimum of one weekly session, with additional, more intensive sessions, as needed.

Play Therapy for Children Ages 4-12
Remote therapy that includes adjunct sessions with parents and/or caregivers.

Medication Services
Virtual medication evaluation and ongoing care. Medication treatment is coordinated with therapy and/or case management services.

Comprehensive Psychological and Neuropsychological Assessment and Testing
Virtual assessment for learning differences, cognitive problems, and the full range of diagnostic and psychological issues. Thorough reports and treatment recommendations are provided.

Clinical Case Management
Provided as a stand-alone remote service or integrated with virtual psychotherapy.

Support Groups
Weekly support groups for people impacted by the pandemic.
The first Shelter in Place order of 2020 left me stranded an hour north of San Francisco. While I was fortunately out of harm’s way, my location and the Bay Area’s new reality meant I would be managing the clinic’s move to remote work from my designed-on-the-fly “home office.”

The first months of the order translated to long hours in consultation with staff creating and tweaking new protocols for nearly everything. This included charting and payment systems, helping therapists understand and navigate the remote therapy world, and making on the spot decisions for questions like “What do we do if we can’t get a safety check on a patient in crisis?”. It also meant setting up our Intake service to be managed remotely, as we anticipated hundreds of calls from people in the Bay Area suffering from new job losses, isolation, and mental health needs unrelated to Covid, but certainly exacerbated by it.

Fortunately, Access Institute is stocked with smart and capable people able to morph with changing needs. This comes with territory in deep psychotherapeutic work. “You have to follow what a patient tells you, and stay with them, no matter what” was a constant refrain in my training. That sentiment has guided my practice, but little did I know how important it would be in this situation.

Through the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, Access Institute has thrived. Our trainees continue to learn, we’ve added new services, and most importantly, our patients continue to heal. I credit the team we had in place when crisis hit. All things are possible when flexible people use their amazing minds!

- Tori Branch, Director of Clinical Services

What brought me to Access Institute was seeing the emotional and physical impact that COVID had caused my family, friends and the people in my community and around the world, I felt that it was time to do something to help, to give back. I feel blessed to work with such amazing and loving people, people who are helping make the world a better place by helping one person at a time. They truly care, they’re passionate about the work they do and the people they see all from different backgrounds and ethnicities. I love that we work with children, helping them overcome their traumas. We become the people and the Institute that they will never forget; the Institute that was there for them when they needed somebody the most.

- Paulina Gavilanez Operations Manager
Attending internship during the pandemic and the political unrest has been an uncertain undertaking. While mental health services are in critical demand right now, there are many obstacles to delivering these services: Can people attain privacy receiving Zoom therapy in their homes? What happens when therapy gets very vulnerable and the internet connection suddenly freezes? Will therapy feel the same, or be as effective, when mitigated by a computer screen?

Contrary to my concerns, I have found myself in a clinic that is radically committed to creative problem-solving and stepping up to the demands of our current moment. I am both heartened by these efforts and proud to be a part of them. Yes: good, reliable therapy can occur in the midst of a pandemic, shaky internet connection or not. Even the smallest moments of human understanding have the potential to provide comfort, support, or even set the stage for subtle shifts in thinking that can ultimately lead to transformation.

The opportunity to offer clinical services at Access Institute has taught me the immense power of psychotherapy and has demonstrated what is possible under the dedicated efforts of the committed clinicians who work, teach, and train here. I am so lucky to be a part of it.

- Intern Assessment Program

As an anxious trainee starting my full-time internship year amid a pandemic, I was unsure how my training would unfold. I imagine my patients felt similar anxieties engaging in treatment under the same circumstance. It is now the half-way point in the training year. Although it’s been challenging, I am grateful for the excellent training that Access has continued to provide for us. This is a shout out to the staff, supervisors, trainees, and instructors that make up the Access community! My patients’ sense of gratitude is also echoed; multiple people have told me how thankful they feel in receiving our services during the current trying times.

- Intern Assessment Program

“The services our trainees have been able to provide this year in the midst of all the ongoing challenges our society continues to face, for me, is truly one of the definitions of labor of love.” – Gergely Földesi
Therapists have also had to work very hard to engage people this year. Many families have been difficult to reach for many reasons. Language has become a greater obstacle, as folks have had less access to translators. Work has sometimes left little time for teachers and parents to talk with a therapist. Finally, just having another telephone or video call can feel like too much after weeks of distance learning or working. It’s a lot harder to engage with children when they can turn off the sound.

Even though this year has been difficult, my work with patients has been an anchor. It hasn’t been easy - some days it feels impossible to show up and hold others when I feel exhausted and scared myself. But it has given me a sense of purpose and certainty when so much of our world is uncertain. It also gives me a good dose of humility - I am going through the exact same external circumstances my patients are going through. I don’t have a rulebook for this in the same way they don’t have a rulebook for this. We are on a path together, and being side by side through it helps me, too.

- Post-graduate Fellow In-School Mental Health Program

At Access Institute, we are working hard to support families in our community. We have had major obstacles, like everyone has, but every week our therapists have been showing up and actively thinking about what else we can do to connect with families and provide a space for them to think about what is happening and make positive changes.

- Loong Kwok, Interim Director of Training and Director of Child Services
One of the many reasons I love training at the Access Institute is because I get to work in a community health setting where we don’t have to mold our work to fit the expectations of insurance companies. This allows us to spend more time with patients and really get to know them and their unique paths to healing. I came here to train because I wanted to avoid the pressure for quick fixes or immediate results that can, in my experience, even hold the work back. Instead, I wanted to be learning and practicing in a place where therapy is supported as a process of unfolding and deep learning, one which requires time, care, deep introspection and openness on the part of the therapist, and patience. For those reasons, Access has been the perfect place to start my clinical social work career.

- Senior Fellow, In-School Mental Health Program

What felt most important was to simply stay in touch with patients, to reassure them that even though Access’ physical location was closed, I was still available to them from home. Initially, this was a difficult concept for folks to imagine. How could we possibly stay connected while being cooped up at home - especially for my elderly patients who are not as tech savvy.

Over time, I found there were perks to using Zoom for case management. For example, patients and I were able to screen share over Zoom which helped us easily work on online applications for Covered CA and Unemployment benefits together. I also became very familiar with conference calling (or “3-way calls”) with patients and outside providers. We were able to use conference calling features to call resources and agencies together even though we weren’t in the same office. I found it easy and convenient to look at resources and websites with patients - each from our own computers - and discuss these in detail. I could easily share links to resources and documents over the chat function. In addition, patients could take pictures of letters they received in the mail (e.g., from CalFresh or MediCal) and email them to me so we could review them together. We really took advantage of all available technology in order to continue our work together.

- Mary Beth Majoros Director of Clinical Case Management Services
Elder Mental Health Program
at Bayview Adult Day Health Center

Working with seniors at the Adult Day Health Center during the pandemic has necessitated a paring down of sorts. We don’t have the benefit of the milieu, or of being together and feeling each other’s physical presence. Instead we meet over the phone, or on the GrandPad. With clients who are hard of hearing or who are not particularly inclined to talk on the phone, sometimes I feel as if my hands are tied, my mouth is tied. The parameters for connection are quite circumscribed. I learned that I have to listen in a particular register to make meaning of what’s happening between us. In a beautiful way, those constraints mean that I have to rely on a connection that feels closer to pure psychoanalysis than any other relational work I’ve done. I can’t fall back on interpretation or on doing treatment in a rote, prescribed way. There’s a lot of internal meaning-making, picking, catching a wave.

- Fellow Elder Program

In years past, our team had more direct contact with both our patients and the staff at Bayview Adult Day Health Center. Conversations with other healthcare providers could happen easily in the hallways, etc. Now we need to be more intentional. More than ever we need to think about our patients holistically. There’s more awareness that mental health and medical issues can’t be separated. And there’s more need for Access Institute to be the glue between our therapists and other providers. This has changed our relationship with other providers and how they see us as more of a resource. I think that this inclusion of mental health care in the entire patient health plan is something that will carry forward post-pandemic.

- Anjali George Director of Elder Services

Connecting with seniors at a time when they are experiencing more isolation than usual because of the pandemic has felt like meaningful, important, and humbling work. This year has demonstrated that, even from a distance, it is possible for a new therapeutic relationship to take root.

- Fellow Elder Program

“There’s more awareness that mental health and medical issues can’t be separated. And there’s more need for Access Institute to be the glue between our therapists and other providers.”

- Anjali George
Early 2020 was quite different from previous years for the Development team. Last March, as the world quickly adjusted to life under lockdown, Access Institute began a transformation – moving from many analog practices into new processes utilizing technology. As fundraising efforts were put on hold or required reimagining, I had the opportunity to collaborate with the larger Access team and assist in streamlining remote meetings and sessions, introducing an electronic records system, and finding creative ways for us to maintain communication while physically separated. Although these projects strayed from my usual responsibilities, they awarded an opportunity to collaborate with teammates that I don’t often have the pleasure of working with. Despite all of the challenges, this time has allowed me to build stronger connections with the team at Access Institute.

- Cristina Reitano, Development Manager

Starting a new position in the midst of a pandemic has been challenging—particularly as a fundraiser, since connecting with donors is essentially very “social.” So, like everyone, the development team has had to get creative in the ways we communicate our message. What I’ve found is that the mission of Access Institute really resonates—especially this year.

Mental health care has been a challenge for so many of us recently. Unfortunately, communities who are currently being hit hardest by the pandemic are statistically the least likely to receive quality mental health services. Access Institute provides care for those in the greatest need who are struggling with mental illness, ensuring quality health services remain affordable and accessible to everyone. If there is any silver lining in this pandemic, it’s this: Empathy for those suffering from mental illness is increasing. We have all experienced the social isolation, and the anxiety over our health and uncertain finances. This can lead to better understanding for our most vulnerable, who live with this every day. One of the reasons I love working at Access Institute is that I am inspired every day by the generosity of those who are putting that empathy into action by donating time or money for the benefit of our community.

- Suzanne Romaine, Director of Development
Financial Highlights

July 2019 - June 2020 Fiscal Year

Revenue

- **Individual Donations** $641,998
- **Foundations** $560,000
- **Service Fees** $365,195
- **Contributed Services** $310,000
- **Partner Contracts** $150,000

Total $2,027,183

Expenses

- **Program Services** $1,484,387
- **Fundraising** $356,253
- **Administrative** $138,542

Total $1,979,182

Thank you for supporting Access Institute

Donations received January 1, 2020 - December 31, 2020

- **$100,000+**
  - Sarnat-Hoffman Family Foundation
  - Ingrid D. Tauber Fund
  - Viragh Family Foundation

- **$50,000+**
  - The McLaughlin Children’s Fund
  - Kaiser Permanente

- **$25,000 - $49,999**
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