



A Bridge & Beyond

April-May 2025

Prioritizing Connection and Well-being

As spring brought new energy and renewal, our April and May were full of meaningful moments that strengthened our community — both for staff and clients. These two months reminded us of the importance of connection, mental health, and taking time to recharge together.



In April, we kicked off a series of team-building activities that gave staff the chance to bond, collaborate, and have some well-deserved fun. Each event helped us build stronger relationships and reinforce our commitment to working together with purpose for our clients.

May marked Mental Health Awareness Month, and we took this opportunity to engage both clients and staff in uplifting and supportive activities. Together, we participated in mindfulness sessions, shared wellness resources, and hosted special events focused on promoting mental health and emotional resilience. Whether it was a group walk, an art session, or simply creating space to talk and listen, every activity was a reminder that caring for our mental well-being is something we do best — together.

This newsletter covers the highlights from both months, celebrating the positive steps we've taken and the memories we've created. Thank you to everyone who participated and made this time so impactful.

News from El Monte

Moments of Creativity and Calm: Highlights from On-Site Activities



Our residential community has been bustling with creativity, nature, and mindful moments. From blooming gardens to hands-on crafts, staff and clients have come together to enjoy a wide range of enriching activities. Each of these activities has provided opportunities for connection, creativity, and self-discovery. We're proud of the vibrant energy and sense of community they bring. As we look ahead, we remain committed to offering meaningful experiences that nourish both body and mind.

Here's a glimpse of some recent highlights around the site.

Tranquilas Garden: Growth and Discovery

In Tranquilas' garden, nature continues to flourish. A sunflower stands tall, nearly ready to bloom, offering a beautiful reminder of growth and renewal. Residents recently spotted a curious grasshopper among the leaves and admired the steady development of our broccoli plants. These small but meaningful encounters with nature bring calm, curiosity, and joy to our everyday routines.



Creative Art Sessions: Clay and Chimes

Art-making has brought fresh energy and expression to our weekly activities. Clients explored clay molding, shaping their ideas into tangible, tactile creations. One favorite project was crafting bunny wind chimes—fun, festive, and a delightful addition to our shared spaces. These sessions encouraged creativity while strengthening fine motor skills and focus.

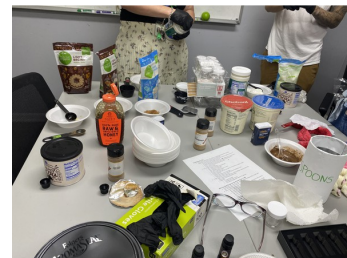


Mental Health Awareness Décor: Inspiration Around Every Corner

To mark Mental Health Awareness Month, our team created inspiring and thoughtful décor throughout the site. These visual reminders—featuring affirmations, calming colors, and wellness messages—reinforced the importance of emotional well-being and self-compassion. The décor sparked meaningful conversations and added a sense of purpose to our shared environment.

Wellness in Focus: Face Masks and Meditation

As part of our ongoing wellness programming, clients recently took part in a relaxing self-care session that included making face masks using natural ingredients. The activity was paired with guided relaxation and meditation, offering a space for rest, mindfulness, and inner calm. It was a refreshing experience that left participants feeling renewed and centered.



News from West Covina 📢



Staff Attends “TAKE ACTION 2025” Mental Health Event

This month, our Case Manager Jessica Valadez attended the *TAKE ACTION 2025* event at Pasadena City College, hosted by the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health. The event focused on promoting mental health awareness and self-care through a variety of engaging and restorative activities.

Attendees enjoyed free food, music, and giveaways while exploring a range of wellness experiences designed to support both mind and body. The event featured free massages, yoga sessions, guided meditation, and hands-on wellness workshops. One popular activity allowed participants to create their own aromatherapy bath scrubs using essential oils, while learning about their calming and therapeutic benefits.

Jessica's participation in events like these not only reflects her personal commitment to wellness but also helps bring valuable insights and ideas back to our PI team and clients. Events like *TAKE ACTION 2025* serve as a reminder of the importance of self-care and accessible mental health resources for all.

Thank you, Jessica, for representing our team and staying connected with the broader mental health community!



News from Woodland Hills 📢

Team Building & Mindfulness in Nature 🌿

Team building activities are integral to maintaining cohesion within the FSP team, fostering effective communication, and mitigating stress and burnout. One of our preferred activities involves leisurely hikes outdoors, providing an opportunity to reconnect with nature and colleagues alike. During these hikes, we engage in skill-building exercises that align with the techniques we teach our clients.

Additionally, we incorporate mindfulness activities, led by our clinicians, to promote relaxation and mental clarity.



Working in the Full-Service Partnership (FSP) program comes with unique challenges, including fatigue, stress, and emotional strain, given the intensive level of services required to support clients with high acuity and chronic mental health needs. To maintain resilience and high-quality care, our team prioritizes mutual support, collaboration, and reflection through regular staff meetings and supervision, creating space to plan, connect, and recommit to our shared mission.

These team outings play a crucial role in strengthening our professional relationships, promoting physical activity, and allowing for mental rejuvenation. They serve as reminders of the meaningful impact of our work and the importance of our collective efforts.



Team Building in Tranquility: A Visit to the Himalayan Salt Cave ❤️

This month, our team at TruStart took a well-deserved pause from the day-to-day hustle for a truly unique and restorative team-building experience—a group session at a Himalayan salt cave.

From the moment we arrived, the atmosphere invited us to relax and let go. Nestled in zero gravity chairs and wrapped in cozy blankets, we began our 45-minute journey in a dimly lit salt cave

designed for deep relaxation and wellness.

Before the session began, we learned about the many benefits of **dry salt therapy**, or halotherapy—an all-natural practice believed to support respiratory health, boost the immune system, reduce stress, and improve skin conditions. With this insight, we were encouraged to set a personal intention for the session.

As the soft glow of the cave surrounded us and the sound of a trickling saltwater cascade played gently in the background, we simply breathed. The air, rich with fine particles of Himalayan salt, created a calming environment that allowed our minds to slow and our bodies to rest.

With soothing music filling the space, many of us found ourselves drifting into a meditative state, enjoying a moment of quiet clarity and collective calm.

This unique experience wasn't just about individual wellness—it was a shared pause, reminding us of the importance of mental health, mindfulness, and taking time to recharge as a team. We left the salt cave feeling lighter, more connected, refreshed, and ready to return to our work with renewed energy, deeper compassion, and a stronger sense of purpose in supporting our clients' recovery journeys.

We're grateful for the opportunity to come together in such a peaceful setting and look forward to more moments that nurture both well-being and camaraderie.

FSP Group Therapy Success

Group therapy offers numerous benefits for clients, including improved social skills, peer support, a sense of community, exposure to diverse perspectives, and the development of new behavioral and emotional coping strategies. Historically, FSP clients have shown some reluctance to attend group sessions, often citing poor attendance and low commitment due to various challenges such as lack of connection to the group topic or curriculum, transportation issues, or general ambivalence.

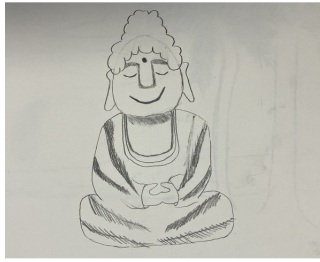
We addressed these barriers—and the results have been a success!

The most recent group therapy experience for FSP clients at the TruStart office has been a pleasant and welcome surprise for everyone involved. Our clinician Danielle Pagan, who has a passion for facilitating group therapy, created and led a *Creative Expression* group, co-facilitated by clinician Leia Minzt. This group guides clients through emotional processing using a variety of creative and artistic mediums, including drawing, poetry, sculpture, and music.

SP clients participate in a welcoming and supportive group environment where they can enjoy snacks and refreshments, engage with peers in a positive setting, and express themselves with the guidance of compassionate clinicians. The group has received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with clients expressing enthusiasm and appreciation for the curriculum, the creative approach to treatment, the clinicians involved, and the opportunity to feel connected and part of something meaningful.

A big thank you goes to Danielle for designing and leading this impactful group, to Leia for her dedicated co-facilitation, to the FSP therapists and case managers who helped get clients registered and transported, and to Grizelda and Denise for ensuring food and beverages were available.

Thank you all!



April Celebrations

Recognizing Autism Acceptance Month: Honoring Neurodiversity in Our Mental Health Work

Autism Acceptance Month is a time to honor the broad and diverse experiences of those who live with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), not just as a diagnosis, but as an identity, a community, and a way of experiencing the world. It reminds us that autism is a spectrum, meaning no two individuals are the same, and each person's strengths and challenges are unique.



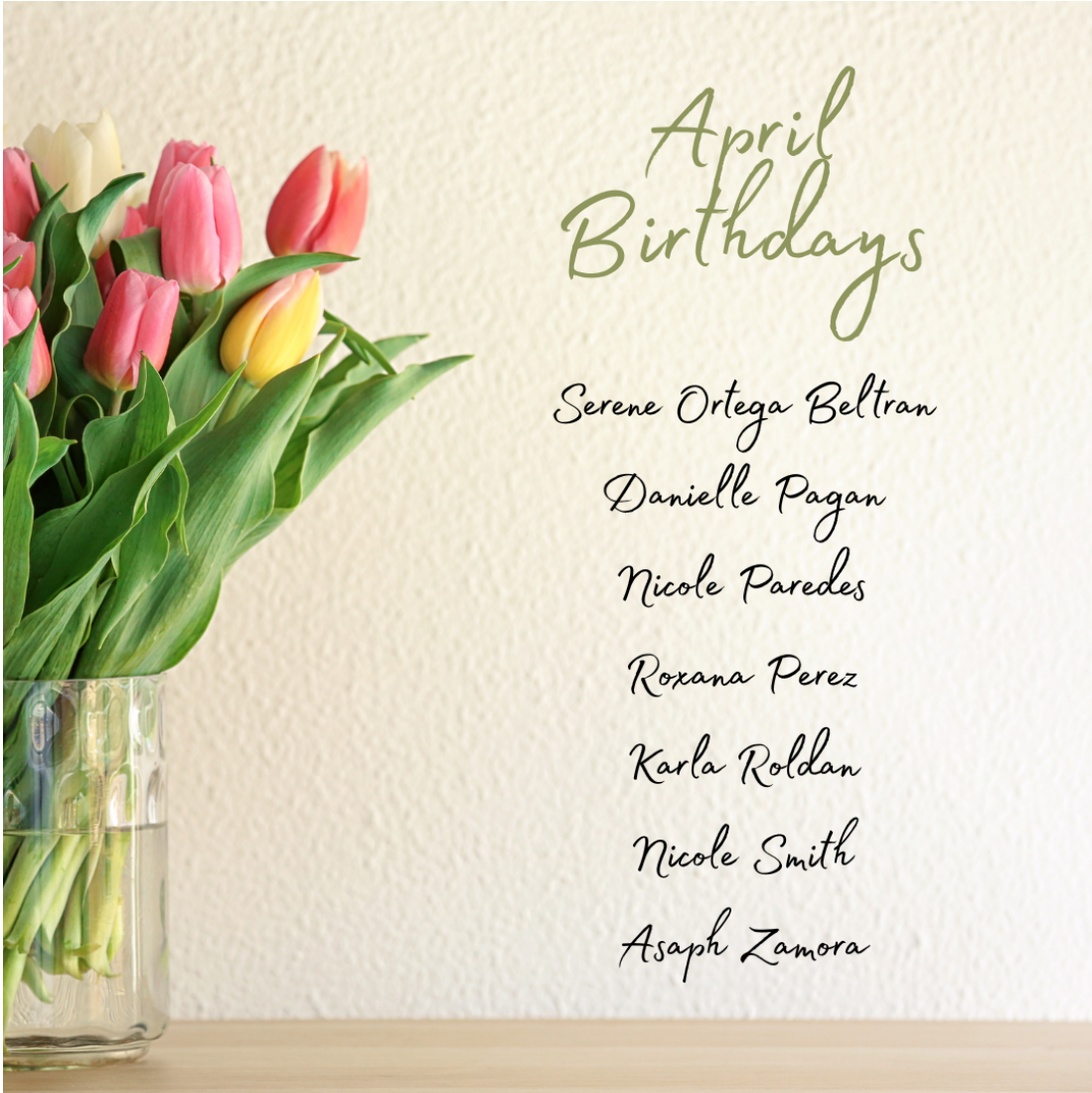
While BRIDGES does not directly provide treatment for autism, our work sometimes intersects, particularly when autism co-occurs with mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, or PTSD. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), "individuals with ASD are at increased risk of developing these and other mental health conditions and may face additional barriers in accessing care that is sensitive to their neurodiversity".

Over the years, we've had the privilege of supporting clients who live with both severe mental illness and developmental differences. Through person-centered care, trauma-informed approaches, and a deep respect for individuality, BRIDGES staff continue to walk alongside clients with complex needs, including those whose journeys may include both psychiatric diagnoses and traits related to autism.

While BRIDGES specializes in mental health services, autism and other developmental disorders often require specialized expertise and resources. Connecting clients to agencies focused on autism ensures they receive the most effective, tailored support for their unique needs. Families in Los Angeles can find assistance through organizations like the Autism Society of Los Angeles (autismla.org) or the Regional Center of Los Angeles (lalrc.org), which offer guidance, services, and support for individuals with autism and their loved ones.

In recognizing Autism Acceptance Month, we also affirm our commitment to inclusivity, understanding, and continued learning, because supporting mental wellness means honoring all the ways people experience and interact with the world.

Monthly Shout-Outs 🙌



April Birthdays

Serene Ortega Beltran

Danielle Pagan

Nicole Paredes

Roxana Perez

Karla Roldan

Nicole Smith

Asaph Zamora



April Anniversaries

Alex de Santiago - 1 year

Alejandra Henderson - 3 years

Lynnae Hernandez - 19 years

Vivian LaFebre - 31 years

Cindy Luna - 8 years

Roxana Perez - 3 years

Paulina Rojas - 8 years

Karla Roldan - 9 years

Asaph Zamora - 1 year

May Celebrations 🍀

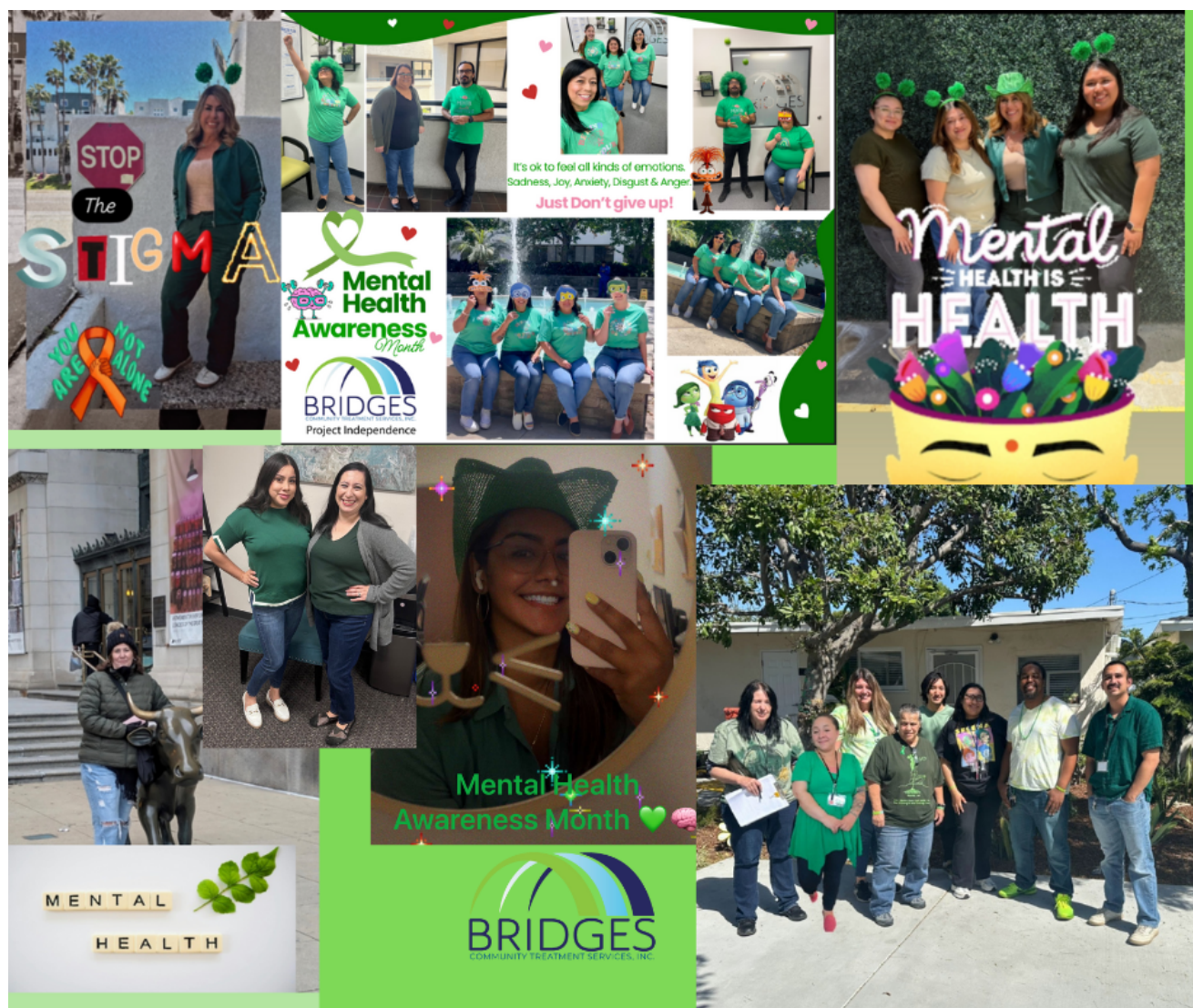
May is Mental Health Month

In recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month, BRIDGES, Inc. joined the nationwide "Be Seen in Green" initiative, originally launched by Mental Health America to promote mental health awareness and advocacy across the country. On Thursday, May 15, staff across all BRIDGES programs participated by wearing green, demonstrating solidarity with the broader movement and reinforcing our commitment to mental health awareness. The goal was simple but powerful: wear green to show support for mental wellness, raise awareness, and help break the stigma surrounding mental health.

To add some fun to the initiative, we held a photo contest recognizing the most creative displays of green. From green shirts and ties to creative accessories and coordinated team outfits, staff showed up in full force—and in full color! Participation was high, and the energy was even higher, as teams embraced the opportunity to visually demonstrate their commitment to supporting mental health for all.

A big thank-you to everyone who participated and helped make this campaign a success. Your creativity and enthusiasm helped spark important conversations and reinforce our commitment to

#MentalHealthMatters #BeSeenInGreen #BRIDGEScares



MAY BIRTHDAYS

Erica Fucci

Denise Machicado

Nancy Martinez

Carlos Portillo

Odalys Rivas

Carmen Roman

Davis Truong





MAY ANNIVERSARIES

Crystal Colindres

Karissa Guzman

Jasmine Jara

Ashley McDowell

Leia Minzt

Andrew Zaragoza

Looking Ahead 🌈

Celebrating PRIDE: Fostering a Safe and Inclusive Space for All

As Mental Health Awareness Month concludes, we embrace June and the celebration of PRIDE, a time to honor the resilience, history, and contributions of the LGBTQIA2S+ community. At BRIDGES, we are dedicated to creating a welcoming, affirming environment for all, including our clients, staff, and community members who identify as LGBTQIA2S+.

Throughout June, our sites will recognize and celebrate PRIDE in a variety of meaningful ways. While activities may differ across programs, staff are encouraged to engage clients in events that foster learning, connection, and celebration, such as themed discussions, creative projects, or opportunities to explore LGBTQIA2S+ history and culture.

On June 10th, we are honored to welcome Dr. Traci Lowenthal, a clinical psychologist and owner of Creative Insights Counseling, as our PRIDE Month trainer. With over a decade of experience supporting the LGBTQIA2S+ community, Dr. Lowenthal approaches her work through a strengths-based, social justice-informed lens. Her session will deepen our understanding and equip us to better support our clients with empathy, respect, and cultural responsiveness. We are grateful for Dr. Lowenthal's ongoing partnership with BRIDGES and her commitment to delivering impactful trainings.

To learn more about Dr. Lowenthal and Creative Insights Counseling, please visit:

 [Creative Insights Counseling](#)

Let us come together to celebrate diversity, promote inclusion, and affirm that everyone deserves to feel safe, seen, and supported—not just in June, but every month.

As DEI advocate Joe Gerstandt reminds us, "Inclusion requires us to become more intentional about our standards in general and in some cases raise them." joegerstandt.com

At BRIDGES, we are committed to taking consistent, intentional actions to foster an inclusive environment for all.

Contributors to this newsletter include Jessica (Project Independence), Shannon (Esperanza), Ashley (Esperanza), Denise (TruStart), Grizelda (FSP), Natalia (FSP), Lori (Executive Director), and Nicole (Executive Assistant).



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