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February 5, 2007

Dear and Valued Friends,

For the past two years our Board and Advisory Board, as well as ACS senior staff, have been working on a long-range strategic plan. We wanted to formulate both the vision and the practical needs that will shape our services going forward. Our goal was clear: to respond fully to the desires this community has expressed. So now the community has spoken, we have heard you, and we now present to you the plan we think will fulfill this community's expectations.

Here's what we have heard: ***This community wants a safe, supportive, accessible place, both on school campuses and in the wider community, where teens and families can be sure to find expert professional counseling that's supportive, compassionate, and affordable.***

To make this happen, ACS has to focus its resources. If we're to strengthen and enlarge our scope as the "go-to" place for Peninsula teens and families who urgently seek education, intervention, counseling, and referral, then we must grow our capacity. Consequently, we must also shed programs that no longer fit the mission we've developed.

As we carefully sifted through our current programs, we realized that the one that doesn't align with any of the others is Caravan House. Thirty years ago, it was founded as a refuge for local runaway teens. Today it predominantly serves young women from the South Bay and other counties. We asked ourselves: should we allocate scarce and valuable resources to a program that no longer serves local youth, or should we reallocate those resources to prevention, intervention, and treatment for teens and their families in our own community?

The decision we finally reached, to close Caravan House, was also made less difficult than we anticipated because there are now a substantial number of comparable placement options. None of the current residents will be set adrift. We will take great care to ensure their safety, support, and counseling as they transition to alternative living arrangements. In fact, if we weren't sure that this step would have no adverse consequences, we wouldn't undertake it. To the contrary, we are very excited because we can now focus on expanding our On-Campus Counseling and Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment Programs, exploring new opportunities for growth, and giving ***all*** teens on the Peninsula access to our counseling, education, and referrals.

So watch us grow! Rest assured that we will continue to be accountable to you. Let us know your thoughts and tell us if we're fulfilling your expectations. We pledge to move towards greater effectiveness, more inclusivity, and more services delivered more broadly.

With our thanks and good wishes,

Jim Pitkow
President, Board of Directors

Philippe Rey, Psy.D.
Executive Director

Adolescent Counseling Services

Questions and Answers about Caravan House

1. What will happen to Caravan House residents?

The house will not be closed until all the girls are placed in comparable and appropriate placements, such as foster care or another group home. When possible, transition work will be done between the current and new therapist for each client. ACS will do everything it can to make the transition smooth for the clients, ensuring that their needs are taken care of.

2. Why now?

ACS needed a new strategic plan, reflective of the vision of the current Board of Directors and Executive Director. Through the strategic planning process, commenced at the beginning of the fiscal year, program alignment concerns were identified. With the vision of ACS as the go to place for adolescent social and emotional health on the Peninsula, the strategic fit of each of our programs needed to be evaluated. ACS is on the verge of exciting growth and focusing our work and resources on local teens and families will allow for greater effectiveness and more lives touched by ACS.

3. Who made this decision?

The ACS Board of Directors chartered the Long-Range Planning Committee to develop a process for and create a new strategic plan for the agency with input from the Board and staff. The LRP contains five Board Members, two Stanford Fellows from the Graduate School of Business and ACS executive staff.

4. What will you do with the house?

ACS is developing a special task force to explore the options for the building within the next 3-6 months.

5. What will happen to the budget?

The funds and energy that went towards Caravan House will now be directed to our current programs and new growth areas. We raised about \$135,000 a year to run Caravan House, funds and efforts that can fuel ACS expansion in meeting the needs of teens and families on the Peninsula.

6. Is ACS in financial trouble?

NO, quite the contrary! With all our generous donors, ACS has maintained and grown our cash reserves and has had success with our fundraising efforts in the past two consecutive years. ACS is poised for growth and expansion, serving more teens and families than ever before.

7. How quickly will the closing of CH occur?

ACS will take every step necessary to ensure a smooth transition and appropriate placement for the young women at Caravan House. For the welfare of the girls and staff, it will be best to expedite the transition, while taking great care to ensure safety, support and therapeutic closure. Once the transition is complete, it will allow ACS to concentrate on increasing the quality of its current programs and expanding to serve more local teens and families, helping them to find their way.

8. What is happening to staff?

Every effort will be made to integrate current staff into other opportunities within the agency. Full-time staff will be provided severance and help with employment transition.

9. What will happen to the ACS knowledge on how to run an effective therapeutic group home?

The program processes and structure are well documented in the Caravan House Program Statement and in licensing documents. ACS will make these documents available to any interested parties. In addition, ACS will let our partner agencies, such as California Alliance of Children and Family Services, Department of Social Services, and individual social workers know that this information is available and that ACS would be more than happy to share our knowledge and expertise.

10. Why are 2 programs better than 3?

It is not so much a matter of the number of programs ACS is able to offer, but the quality, efficiency and accessibility of the services ACS is able to provide local teens and families under the new plan. ACS is poised and ready for growth, with a strategic vision for ACS to be the go-to-place for adolescent social and emotional health on the Peninsula. Under the new plan, ACS is able to focus its resources to expand to meet the growing need of local teens and families through counseling, education and substance abuse treatment

11. If you are not running CH, what are you doing?

With a vision of making counseling and education accessible to all teens and families on the Peninsula, ACS is expanding upon its existing programs and exploring new opportunities for growth. ACS is aligning its existing programs to do what ACS does best—to provide support, help and guidance for local teens and families during the challenging period of adolescence.

12. Is your board behind you?

Yes. As previously stated, the ACS Board of Directors chartered the Long-Range Planning Committee to develop a process for and create a new strategic plan for the agency. The Board of Directors, along with ACS staff, provided their input. The final proposal was made by the LRP Committee, consisting of five board members, two Stanford fellows from the Graduate School of Business, and ACS Executive Staff. The Board of Directors voted on this new strategic direction, with a unanimous vote of approval.

Please do not hesitate to contact Philippe Rey, Executive Director at 650.424.0852 ext. 101 with any questions, comments, reactions, etc...

We appreciate and value your input!