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Mesilla Valley Community of Hope

2018

Hope Stories

Interview 7

Pamela Angell Transcript Index & Excerpt

Amador Health Center

Interviewed by David Lee del Norte

13 July 2018

La Paz Room at Jardin de Los Niños on the Hope Campus

Sponsored by Doña Ana County Historical Society

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Project History

The Mesilla Valley Community of Hope (MVCH) is a homeless services corridor in Las Cruces, New Mexico. In the 1970s, Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church began a small lunch service which later became El Caldito Soup Kitchen. As need for food and healthcare clinical service increased, the Las Cruces community supported the Saint Andrew's congregation with the opening of Saint Luke's Health Clinic. With a long history of compassionate services for visitors, the City of Las Cruces recognized the importance of limiting distance and travel-time between public health and human service organizations located throughout different parts of the city.

Incorporated as a non-profit in 1991, additional support continued to shape collaborative alliances with operations at 999 West Amador nearby to downtown Las Cruces. In 2011, following a particularly harsh "Deep Freeze" winter that caused health concerns and exposure deaths for the homeless, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope staff banded together with Hope Campus clients, appealed to the City of Las Cruces for sanctioned overnight camping status, and soon founded Camp Hope transitional living program.

In 2018, the Hope Stories project collected fifteen oral history interviews to learn about the legacy of organizational homeless services at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope. The term "Corridor of Care" refers to a healthcare industry perspective known as the Consolidated Services Model that helps people to access health and human service related programs quickly, reliably, and within centrally located "Hub" or "Node" areas of potentially consistent preventative care.

This public history graduate project asked participating narrators questions about how the Las Cruces community first began to advance, reinforce, and collaborate with the actions necessary to become the Hope Campus at Mesilla Valley Community of Hope. Rather than conduct interviews with those who experienced homelessness, the project features staff and volunteer narrators who shared community engagement stories about consolidated services “Campus” concepts.

The project ended without narrators to represent the community’s food pantry. Founded in 1979, Casa de Peregrinos relocated to the Hope Campus as an alliance member during the 1991 opening, and today continues to serve Doña Ana County with increased food delivery and expanded satellite locations. Two additional perspectives from outside the Hope Campus: the fourth interview with Glenn Trowbridge took place at CARE Complex in Las Vegas, Nevada, an out-of-state counter-balance to the history of homeless consolidated services in the United States; while the fifteenth interview with Kit Elliott and Meg Long occurred at Aggie Cupboard on the NMSU campus, a satellite food pantry inspired by Casa de Peregrinos.

Today’s work to help the homeless in Las Cruces is the result of a compassionate, multi-organizational approach by non-profit service providers. In 2018, these five core non-profit organizations include Mesilla Valley Community of Hope; Casa de Peregrinos food pantry; El Caldito soup kitchen; Jardin de Los Niños educational program; and Amador Health Center (formally Saint Luke’s Health Clinic). With Hope Campus the geographic center of non-profit homeless service providers in Las Cruces, it is important to note assistance and resources offered by the City of Las Cruces, the New Mexico Department of Health, and the New Mexico Department of Human Services. For an updated and comprehensive list of regional community services, insightful for anyone experiencing homelessness, inquire City of Las Cruces or MVCH with search term “Las Cruces Community Resource Guide.”

Narrator Summary

Pamela Angell grew up in Fairfield, Connecticut. With a Professional Writing degree from University of New Mexico, Angell wrote for a small newspaper in Grants, New Mexico, later relocating to work as a reporter for the Las Cruces Sun News writing about Borderland politics, New Mexico Colonias, and American Education. Angell went on to serve as director for Doña Ana County Humane Society in Las Cruces.

In 2001, as executive director of Mesilla Valley Community of Hope, Angell advocated for Las Cruces homeless services and organized fundraiser events to increase community awareness. During this time, Angell earned a Masters of Public Administration from New Mexico State University. In 2010, Angell joined the Committee on Veterans' Affairs to deliver statements to the U.S. House of Representatives on the topic of "Providing Essential Services and Benefits to Veterans in New Mexico and Across America."

In 2011, Angell became executive director of Saint Luke's Health Clinic, during which time the Las Cruces community experienced increased cases of homelessness. Rather than prohibit overnight camping, Angell asked members of the homeless community to identify the resources they needed and wanted. This collaboration between Hope Campus leadership, the homeless community, and Las Cruces City Council resulted in temporary measures for the tent-city known as Camp Hope. Eventually zoned to address public safety concerns, and legally sanctioned by the City of Las Cruces, under the model of "Self-governance" Camp Hope offers residents Housing First transitional living with access to partner programs located on the Hope Campus.

In 2012, Saint Luke’s Health Clinic organized Cafe Salud, a weekly Harm Reduction Program event designed to support wellness and wellbeing with vital nutrition, exercise, and health triage information. During the first Cafe Salud, a New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) mobile clinic offered free HIV and Hepatitis screenings, personal safe-sex kits, and a needle and syringe exchange. The event also offered a Naloxone aerosol spray training session to advocate for the prevention of opiate overdoses.

In 2018, Angell helped orchestrate a campaign to renovate Saint Luke’s Health Clinic facilities and services. Rebranded by name, logo, and Hope Campus location, no longer considered an unsustainable “Free Clinic,” Amador Health Center increased behavioral and clinical healthcare opportunities with low-income sliding-fee billing schedules alongside Las Cruces community access for those covered by health insurance.

Index of first hour

00:11 - Interview introduction

01:08 - Amador Health Center rebranding

01:33 - Narrator biography

03:52 - Education and career potential

05:56 - Travel, camping, backpacking, vacationing; differences between Living-Rough

08:24 - Personal experience with student homelessness

11:16 - “Family connection” and “Living in the shadow of homophobia”

13:25 - Work programs, Income Support, Food Stamps, and Title IX training

15:08 - Importance of healthcare access for families

16:41 - Employer provided insurance and affordability of healthcare

17:46 - Doña Ana County and former NM governor’s perspective of federally designated Colonias

20:14 - Safety concerns, and legally sanctioning a tent-city camping

24:04 - The Great Conversation, and Camp Hope client advocacy with City of Las Cruces

26:22 - Saint Andrew’s Church consolidated services concept for “One-stop shop”

28:59 - United States’ “Finacial phenomenon” of homelessness, greed, and gentrification

32:12 - “Sliced and diced” Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

Index of first hour (cont.)

34:08 - Snowball effect of chronic homelessness and mental illness

37:34 - “Chronic is continuous” homelessness contrasted to “Episodic” homeless

39:29 - “Waiting room for housing” perspective of Camp Hope tent-city

41:04 - Acute health issues triage for homeless and low-income clients

43:40 - Blindness caused by diabetes and delayed treatment

44:53 - Advocating for clients before and after jail time

47:25 - Judge Joy Goldbaum, balancing executive director titles, and Homeless Court

51:47 - Court proceedings’ advocates, and “Failure to appear” warrants that disrupt transition to housing

55:21 - Preventive care, pharmacy, and the Affordable Care Act funding expansion

59:04 - Saint Luke’s Health Clinic services change to Amador Health Center

Index of second hour

01:02:06 - Community options for health insurance, Medicare, sliding-fee payment scale

01:03:54 - From “Free clinic with all volunteer doctors” to “Federally qualified health center”

01:06:17 - Grand opening, outreach, and rebranding to Amador Health Center

01:08:46 - New client visits the day after opening

01:11:02 - Security guard needs, and no tolerance for open drug use

01:12:25 - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSA); AcuDetox with National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA)

01:14:22 - Cafe Salud, preventative care, and cold weather mornings

01:18:04 - Commercial kitchen space to expand Cafe Salud services

01:21:14 - Agency of Hope campus clients, Cafe Salud attendance, and “In-house outreach”

01:23:05 - Identifying between medical “Patients” and social work “Clients”

01:24:00 - New and upcoming services of Amador Health Center

01:24:35 - Alternative wellness fair, western medicine, and healthcare options

01:27:37 - Working on Hope Campus, future dreams, and Amador Pediatric Care with Jardin

01:29:43 - Safety of Jardin de Los Niños, and potential domestic abusers on Hope Campus

Index of second hour (cont.)

01:31:41 - Health Resources & Services Association (HRSA) Three-year staffing grant, Medicaid, Medicare, and Sustainability of Amador Health Center

01:35:21 - Nonprofit leadership perspectives contrasted to healthcare access for low-income clients

01:37:53 - Amador Health Center support from health insurance covered patients

01:39:53 - Destigmatization of homelessness and community of Las Cruces compassion

01:42:30 - Social equality, love and respect, and the importance of lack of judgement

01:44:11 - Affordable housing, “Shared housing unit” development, cost effective living

01:45:40 - “Unequivocal healthcare for everybody” in the United States

01:47:30 - Camp Hope as “Waiting room for housing,” and myth that all homeless people want to live outside

01:50:42 - Consistent respectful treatment for Hope Campus clients despite “Banned list”

Interview 7 Excerpt — Narrator Pamela Angell:

We're trying to get the word out because for twenty years, twenty-eight years, twenty-five years, we were a free clinic for only adults, and with all volunteer doctors, and, the last three years, we're a free clinic depending on your sliding-fee scale. If you've got no income, we don't turn away anybody for ability to pay. But, we also see children. So, we've had a big shift. This is kind of why we changed our name, because Saint Luke's Health Care Clinic means free clinic, open a couple of days a week, barely; all volunteer doctors, only sees adults, doesn't take any insurance.

Amador Health Center is a fully functioning, federally qualified health center. We can take patients of any age, any ability to pay. We take multiple insurance [providers]. We do take Medicaid and Medicare. Our mission is always going to include those who can be— who may have nowhere to go. It's always going to include people who are homeless, people who are undocumented.

We don't ask about citizenship. People who are indigent. People who have serious mental illness that makes it difficult to be around other people. But, we're not an island. And to be a sustainable clinic in this day and age when health care costs are so expensive, and health care providers staff salaries are so expensive, to be sustainable we really need that diversity.

Pamela Angell:

You know, thirty to forty percent of our patients are so low-income they don't pay a dime, so if we can get sixty or seventy percent of our patients who have insurance that would help us do our complete mission.

del Norte: How are you trying to get the word out about what you just explained to me? Is this a campaign beyond just the opening of the new center?

Angell: Yes. We did a little— We had a big grand opening thanks to the two-hundred and eighty-three people who came to our event. We were thrilled. We provided artisan pizza, wood-fired pizza for— I planned on two-hundred, and because I really wanted to hit two-hundred at our grand opening, and we got two hundred and eighty-three. And we had plenty of pizza to go. We ran out of the backpacks we were giving away. But, it was a really nice event. And we changed our name. We did a whole rebranding. We did a logo contest to get our name out there. Unfortunately, we haven't told the people yet who did not win the logo contest because a key person in my department quit two-and-a-half weeks before the grand opening, and a CEO without an administrative assistant is like a bird without wings. That's what I feel like sometimes.

del Norte: So, you're looking for some wings?

Pamela Angell:

Yeah. I have some interviews today of two administrative assistants. But, yeah, so we did a whole big rebranding. We're gonna be doing social media, revising our website— We're actually gonna pay for marketing this year.

We did some advertisement in the Bulletin [Local weekly newspaper]. We did some press releases. We did a spot on KRWG [Radio], where they'll do events, and it's a very reasonable cost to have like a fifteen second spot about our upcoming events, so a lot of people heard that. But, we are doing a lot more outreach. We go to different events that are happening in the community. We go to El Caldito soup kitchen, Casa de Peregrinos food bank. We're working with La Casa [Inc.] We're just trying to do a lot more outreach, and also the schools, the universities, to let people know anybody can come here.

And we're trying to make sure that our lobby is always respectful of our staff, and of the other people that are there, but the day after the health—the day after our grand opening, I walked in, and it was so heartening. First, I saw a woman standing outside. I said, “Buenos Dias,” and she must have recognized me. She said, “Thank you.” And then I said, “Thank you,” and I went over, and we hugged. I said, “Thank you for coming to us, and believing in us.”

Pamela Angell:

And then I walked in, and there was a fellow with no legs sitting, waiting for an appointment, and another fellow like leaning, kind of leaning over like he was napping— And we do wanna, you know, if you wanna come to our clinic, you need to be there for services inside our clinic, and so, I did ask somebody later, I said, “Is that one, is that man that was napping earlier, did he have an appointment?” And she said, “He was bringing his dad.” So, here’s a thirty year old son who probably worked all night someplace for minimum wage, or all day in a field; he’s bringing his father for health care, and taking a little cat nap.

And so, you may see people that may not make you feel that comfortable, if you go to a posh “Other” clinic elsewhere, but those are people that are, it makes me feel comfortable that they’re there. You know, and if somebody is having some slight issues that, as long as they’re not using foul— like, we’ll police a little bit. No foul language. No major disruptions. But, if there’s somebody who’s struggling that day, I want them there, and I wanna go to a clinic that allows them there. So, it’s— And we have different waiting areas, the way it’s split up, so you can sit in different, you know, if somebody’s bothering you, which I haven’t seen happen yet. You can move to a different waiting area.

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Recording Information

Hope Stories 07 — 1h 51m duration. Recording held at Jardin de Los Niños La Paz Room on the Hope Campus.

Transcripts and Recordings

Listen, read, and request Hope Stories complete transcripts, sound recordings, and 2018 project research box at New Mexico State University Library and Special Collections.