

WHO KNEW

Psychology for All

Local nonprofit makes psychotherapy more accessible

By Constance Brossa

A commitment to breaking down barriers fuels a Charlotte-area nonprofit's mission to help those with mental health issues.

Psychology for All delivers free psychotherapy services to Charlotte-Mecklenburg residents 18 and older who cannot access care for reasons including financial hardship and cultural barriers. The organization connects licensed clinicians to clients in need, providing discounted mental health services.

Criteria for clients include being uninsured and at or below 175% of federal poverty guidelines. "We look at your income, we look at whether you have insurance, we look at whether you have insurance with a high deductible," says Yu-jay

Harris, president of Psychology for All's board of directors. "We really want to meet the needs of those who can't afford (mental health services). We get our clients primarily through partnerships with organizations (such as the Salvation Army)."

Each client receives at least eight sessions with a clinician. Clients have an average household income of \$50,000 supporting three or more people. Most clients are Black and Hispanic women, but Harris notes there are "men that we're trying to serve as well."

Most of the 20 mental health providers at Psychology for All are white, but Harris says, "We're slowly growing our representation (of Black and Hispanic clinicians)." Clinicians'

We had the vision to start Psychology for All because we believe top-quality mental health services should be available to everyone.

—David Verhaagen

specialties include anxiety, depression, family issues, marriage and parenting.

Psychology for All pays its providers \$65 per hourly session. Donors provide funding. One donor, Southeast Psych, is a founder of Psychology for All and has offices in Ballantyne and SouthPark.

"Psychology for All provides a critical service to our community," says Lynn Vivian, one of the nonprofit's clinicians and a provider at Southeast Psych in Ballantyne. "It has been a privilege to provide my time and services to an organization that brings resources to an unserved community. Gaining access to the mental health system can be difficult for many and an overwhelming process. It's been rewarding to work with clients through this program."

"Because we have a limited amount of sessions we provide, we don't deal with the most acute cases," such as paranoia or suicide, Harris explains.

Like many in their industry, Psychology for All providers have relied heavily on teletherapy throughout the pandemic.

"When you think about the population that we're serving, transportation can be a barrier, but everyone has a smartphone or a tablet ... and I think that (teletherapy) has really expanded our reach," Harris notes. "Growth exploded last year, and it's been even stronger this year. We've actually reached our 100th client."

In addition to donors, the nonprofit is always on the lookout for volunteers to assist with content generation, fundraising and grant writing. Board members, donors, providers and volunteers from Ballantyne are all involved with the organization.

Harris, the vice president of client growth and relationship management at Socratic Technologies, a customer and market research consultancy, has been a part of Psychology for All since it was launched six years ago by his friend David Verhaagen.

"I've always been curious about human behavior. (Verhaagen) and some other folks decided to start this organization. And he told me about it and what they're doing, and I thought, 'Well, that's fantastic. Because there's a huge need for this.' And I've been serving pretty much since 2015. It's

become more of a passion for me."

Verhaagen adds: "We had the vision to start Psychology for All because we believe top-quality mental health services should be available to everyone. Our practice, Southeast Psych [which Verhaagen co-founded in Charlotte and Nashville], does well with individuals and families who have financial means, but not everyone can readily afford to see our therapists or other outstanding therapists in town.

"We wanted to create a way for everyone to have access not just to any mental health services but

excellent mental health services.

Psychology for All realizes that vision."

Psychology for All's mission of service extends beyond individual clients. The organization also hosts free (donations are encouraged) webinars, such as a November session focused on mental health and the Christian faith. There are plans for a session this winter.

"We really want to invite the community, so this is for everybody, not just clinicians" or clients, says Harris. ©

Details: psychologyforall.org.

Yu-jay Harris is president of Psychology for All's board of directors.

