

The California Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability
Commission Presents...

MHSOAC

Expressions



A Collection of Client and Family
Artwork and Writing

MHSOAC
Mental Health Services
Oversight and Accountability Commission

Volume 1
July 2009

MHSOAC *Expressions*

Contents

Wordscapes 3-7

Road to Recovery 8-9

**A Picture's
Worth** 10-11

**Index of Featured
Artists** 12

A Word from the Executive Director

Welcome to our first ever edition of MHSOAC Expressions! In response to the overwhelming amount of client and family artwork and writing that we received as a result of our Call for Arts and Writing for our quarterly publication, MHSOAC Update, we decided to create a newsletter dedicated solely to artistic expression. The result: MHSOAC Expressions!

Thank you to all the clients, family members, and stakeholders from programs all over California who submitted their artwork, poetry, and personal success stories.

You'll find some outstanding and

insightful poetry in the section titled "Wordscapes". Each poem has been paired with one or two pieces of art as illustration.

In "Road to Recovery" you'll find success stories of recovery from past and current mental health clients. Each story has a unique perspective on the recovery process, and will leave you sharing the author's sense of optimism about the future.

"A Picture's Worth" is a collection of brilliant artwork. I think you'll find they really are "worth a thousand words".

I hope you'll enjoy this first edition of MHSOAC Expressions, and please let us know what you think.

Until next time,

Sheri Whitt

Executive Director



The MHSOAC is always accepting client and family art and writing submissions for consideration in our publications and on our website.

To obtain the submission form and to submit work, contact the Art Coordinator via:

Email: mhsaac@dmh.ca.gov **or Fax:** 916-445-4927,
Attention: Communications Unit,
Amy Shearer



*"Art teaches
nothing except the
significance of
life."
- Henry Miller
(1891-1980)
American author*

Center art on cover page:
"Flower Pot"
Margo G.
Fresno County

"Hands"
Gabriel G.
San Bernardino County

Wordscapes

The following pieces of artwork and poetry were submitted by consumers and family members. A huge thank you goes out to these talented individuals for sharing their experiences, and we hope you will find these pieces as insightful as we did.

**MHSOAC Communications*

***"A poem begins in delight
and ends in wisdom."***

- Robert Frost (1875-1963)

Imagine...

a world with no poetry, no stories for us to listen to. Imagine there are no poets because to us what they write is gibberish - the uninitiated - the unable to learn, unable to listen, unable to translate the cryptic messages which are encoded with an essence unattainable to us all. Imagine the cycles of our lives,

going around and around and around again. The same repetitiousness that we live in every day.... Our energy sapped day after day, unwillingly spreading ourselves too thin to comprehend that *we live in poetry*.

**Abridged*

By Galeladi M. R.
Humboldt County

Snapdragons

Beware of the snapdragons,
Their jaws made of petals
Lavender, yellow and white
Pointing like spears into the light
Their beauty shadows their bite.

As I emerge from a forest
Dark and dusty beneath a canopy
Of weeping willows that warn me
Of the stark brightness beyond,

I wade through the meadow of
cattails
And wildflowers that sway with
Such grace and ease
As they flow with the wind and
Bow to the breeze
Leaving shadows of sprigs
Among stepladders of leaves

I see the snapdragons
Standing tall among the weeds
Catching my eye with their pride
As I stride toward their stalks of
flowers
That flutter and flirt

As they beckon me
To the beauty that belies their bite,
A soft nibble of love
Like doves, I take flight
Into the warmth and dreams,
Having escaped the darkness of night
I now bask in the glow at its very
height



"The Pathway"

Margo G.
Fresno County

In the pillowy sky with swirls of light
I float like a balloon
Past the wisp of the moon
I wave to the snapdragons
Whose soft nuzzles awakened me
To the brilliance
And the beauty
Of living beyond fright

And I realize, I just might
Heal from the pain
That would no longer stain
The happiness and joy
That pressed against my chest
And squeezed me with a reassuring
hug
That now I could rest

Among the snapdragons below
And learn to grow
Now that I know
That everything will be alright.

By Robyn G.
Ventura County

"Clematis"

Dawn C.
Riverside County



The Grooming Hour

They do your nails there,
 They do your hair and make up.
 "The Grooming Hour," they call it,
 Manicure and pedicure for free.
 They issue you a bracelet
 With your name and birth date
 Impressed in slate blue.
 They take away wedding rings,
 Keys and IDs just for safety.



"Woman's Face"
 Sandy M.
 Riverside County

They give you gowns and socks,
 All complimentary.

They take your vital signs there.
 Air bubbles. Spin. Intensity.
 And I'm trapped in a familiar storm.
 I have no shape or form.
 They inform you of your rights,
 All written in a booklet size 5x5.
 They give you a pay phone,
 But not the money for local calls.
 They keep paper, pencils, and postage
 available
 For a fee quite small.

They serve "Chicken a La King,"
 there.
 They serve orange juice, should you
 care,
 And iced tea on demand should you
 prefer.
 But they allow only plastic silverware.
 They have surveillance cameras
 And monitors by Canon.
 I spent seventeen days in a narrow
 room
 On permanent suicide watch.
 After the birth, the baby, the blues.
 Actually, they have a TV.
 And on Sundays they show DVDs.
 They take your blood pressure every-
 day
 And your vital signs throughout your
 stay.
 Legal Hold, they call it.
 I call it, Neptune's visit.

A cyclone came,
 Cyclone is another name for hurricane
 And for what went on inside me
 When I was there.
 Frugal words,
 Imperfect silence.
 So many stories washed away
 They do take your pen away.
 They give electrical shocks there.
 They keep you in seclusion to avoid
 injury,
 They take away restraints when you
 behave properly.
 If you agree, they shall provide psy-
 chosurgery.

They give you pills there.
 Haldol, Prozac and Lamictal
 Take your depression and delusions
 away.
 And put you to sleep
 In the most unfathomable way.
 They give you Writ of Habeas Corpus
 To fight unlawful detention
 Should it come to their attention.
 If you relinquish it, they don't care.
 But they don't allow disturbances
 there.
 They don't keep your valuables.
 They do keep your record.
 And they do your nails there,
 They do your hair and make up
 Should you care

By Aliete G.
 Los Angeles County

Messages

*Soar like the eagle
 Toward your
 Hopes, dreams, and goals
 You have the strength
 To prevail
 It's in your
 Heart-mind-and-soul...
 Be who you are
 At work and at play
 Let your wisdom
 Encompass
 Each night and each day...
 Write your own story
 As it softly unfolds
 Sentence by sentence*

*Until chapters are told...
 Experience each moment
 The here and the now
 Each fleeting second-
 You surely know how...
 Find humor in yesterday
 And in tomorrow
 Smile on today
 Dwell not on your sorrow...
 Listen with care
 Learn lessons with ease
 And know that you're as loved
 As a gentle, spring breeze.*

By Barbie G.
 Sonoma County



"Little Girl"
 Marisa F.
 San Bernardino County

Accentuate the Positive

This is a poem that I write to myself, for myself.
 Be happy, because life is fragile and so short.
 There's no need to be anxious all the time.
 What is one complete breath worth?
 What is one single step, by oneself worth?
 What is one single heartbeat, a good one worth?
 It's not worthless. On the contrary, it has much value.
 But people do not put much value on practical wisdom.
 I've read heavy books, by heavyweight thinkers.
 They all say the same thing. Take care of yourself.
 Take care of yourself and be compassionate to yourself.
 If one can be compassionate to oneself then one
 Can be compassionate and loving to others.
 There's already much sorrow in this, our world.
 It's not us against them anymore. It's all together.
 Just enjoy what there is to enjoy. It's just simple.
 The anxiety just eats at me. There's no joy in it.
 Be non-judgmental. It's best to not judge others.
 It's preferable not to be angry and hateful.
 Just decide to relax and enjoy in the present.
 It's not that bad. It just seems that way.
 Just be on the positive side, that's all it takes.
 Like my friend likes to say. Accentuate the positive.
 That's the truth. Just accentuate the positive.
 And also, someone told me to be truthful to oneself.



“Serenity Soup”
 David B.
 San Diego County

It's better to be in the truth, than to be in a lie.
 Again, I say to myself, to accentuate the positive.

By Giovanni M.
 Monterey County



A New Day



“Sunset”
 Fernando B.
 San Diego County

The morning
 is sweetness
 with dew-scented
 air

The eastern horizon
 is aglow with
 color

A sun of
 a new day
 beckons...

The earth
 awakens
 to give
 precious life
 to all

Is man
 worthy
 of so fine
 a gift?

By Vivian L.
 San Bernardino County

Twenty

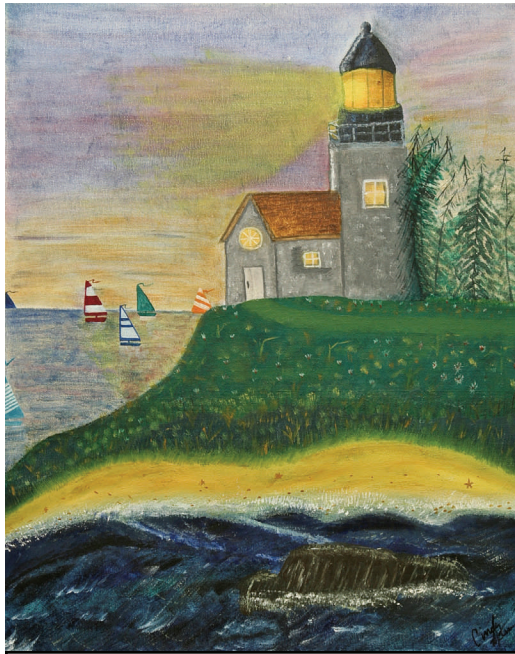
The distant Hill frosted by fog
Follows me as the sun
Shines its sleepy rays on my face
The immediate landscape
Moves freely, passing me;
Leaving me
Ahead and into the future

The dark hill will never leave
Like the passing of time,
It remains constant.
Sometimes it fades from sight
When the fog is so thick,
I can't remember what it looks like.

And the busy landscape pops out at
me.
Its malleability frightens me.
But then the fog clears,
And the Hill reveals
Its secret,
Shining its wisdom
Between the immediate and distant
past.

Today I can see the Hill
For it's not far off.

I can remember what's behind it:
A meadow full of flowers and animals,
And fresh youthful springs.
I dare not venture to the Hill.



"Lighthouse"

Cindy M.
San Bernardino County

My forward destination
Is now my focus.
To go there would take me backwards.
My visual affirmation is enough fuel
for
Contemplation.

But one day, I will have to go back.
I will feel the thorns in my skin
And get lost in the maze of shrubbery.
The desert will scorch my feet,
And my tears will quench my thirst.

When I get there again, I will stand
At the top and see the mistaken
Paths
That I have taken, more than once.
But this time I will map my way
Back home,
And find it with less pain.

When I get Home, I will look
Out my window and see
The same hill,
But its paths will be well marked,
And it will stand closer to Home.

By Andrée R.
Alameda County

Not Just a Gift Was Given

This precious gift came from Heaven.
I've got to thank God for giving me a son to love.

He loaned you to me
Just enough time to know you
Plenty of time to love you
I know your love lives on, I feel your love
when warm sun shines on me
Every time a gentle breeze whispers softly
through the trees

It makes the leaves dance for me

I know your love still lives

I feel your love all around me

I know it is time for me to move on

I'm learning to live my life for you, through me

By Kippi K.
San Bernardino County



"Madonna, Joseph, and Infant Jesus"

Claire G.
Santa Clara County

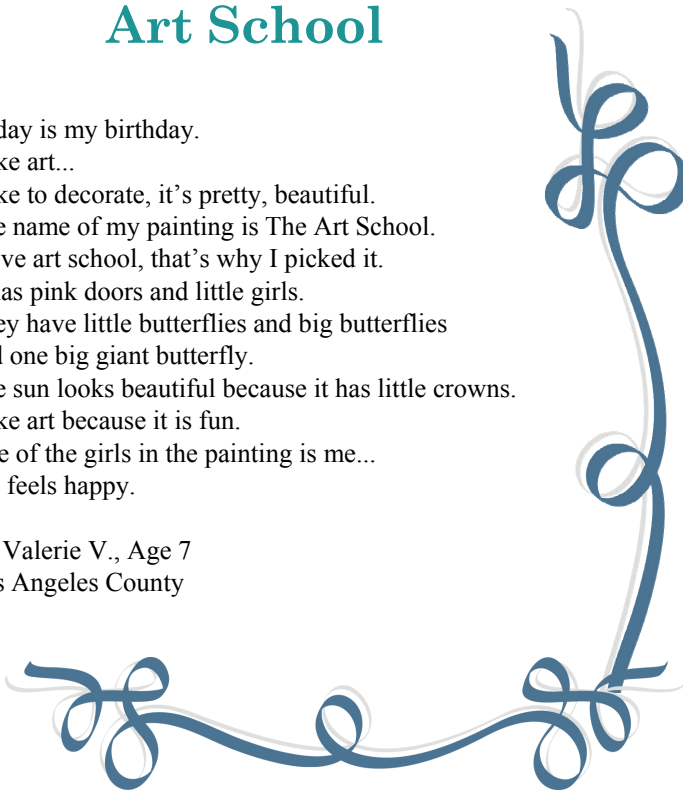


“Art School”
Valerie V., Age 7
Los Angeles County

Art School

Today is my birthday.
I like art...
I like to decorate, it’s pretty, beautiful.
The name of my painting is The Art School.
I love art school, that’s why I picked it.
It has pink doors and little girls.
They have little butterflies and big butterflies
and one big giant butterfly.
The sun looks beautiful because it has little crowns.
I like art because it is fun.
One of the girls in the painting is me...
she feels happy.

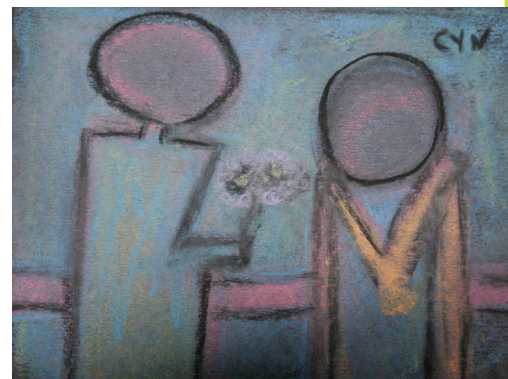
By Valerie V., Age 7
Los Angeles County



Love Is

We have a heart, a mind, a soul
That can’t be measured with a bowl
Physical organs might they seem
Are you tricked by such a dream?
Think again where love comes from
Try real hard, can it be done?
Or does it float around our heads
Or manufactured in our beds?
Do we create such pure emotion?
Or luck encountered, tide of ocean?
Where does love go when not in use
Aisle four, shelf two, next to the juice?
Is it words along with gifts
Or cycle ‘round in eight hour shifts?
Does it keep, gotta check the date
Or black and white compared with hate?
To me love has no boundary lines
I’m in no need for metal signs
There isn’t time to sit and wait
Can’t shrug it off and call it fate
Love to me engulfs the air
It’s overwhelming, everywhere
I don’t fall in and it doesn’t get broken
No selective hand-out token
My heart’s the mold from where it starts
Ingredients are proportioned parts

A pinch of mind—a dash of soul
Lightly browned, the baker’s goal
Perfection crust, flake divine
Open window cooled just fine
So does this answer love’s creation
Do we feel appreciation?
Love is all there is required
Understand it, you’ll be hired
On time always, hard at work
Avoid the snares where slackers lurk
And once the job and day complete
Your pay in love will buy a seat



“My Family” and “First Love”
Cynthia M.
Fresno County



The bus ride home you will not fear
With love through God, look,
 heaven’s near
The day is done, at home, at rest
If you have loved, you’ve done your
 best
There is not a place where love comes
 from
Love is us, it’s everyone.

By Michael B.
Alameda County

Road to Recovery

Past and current mental health clients share their inspiring stories of their journey through mental illness to a place of wisdom and hope for the future.



A Journey of Recovery Leading Me Back to Work

Hello, my name is Lorie. I have been asked to tell you all about my journey through my mental illness, to a point of recovery where I can work part time. This part of my story starts 4.5 years ago when I became diagnosed with severe clinical depression then later on with schizoaffective disorder. My recovery included seeing a psychiatrist, taking medications, going to NAMI, DBSA, OA, Pathways to Recovery meetings, the support of my family and friends and most of all,

*“What is my message here?
Anything is possible.”*

time. You hear that time heals all wounds. Well in my case it seems to be true. 1.5 years ago a goal of mine came to fruition. I began working part time for the County of San Bernardino. My position is called Peer and Family Advocate II. I am working with my peers under the

supervision of Bob S- to help our peers get the support they need. I am leading groups, teaching classes etc. as Bob directs us. This is quite an opportunity for me and I am very grateful for the chance being given to me to spread my wings and fly. What is my message here? Anything is possible.

Lorie B.E.
San Bernardino County

Hope and Recovery

Over 30 years ago my ambitions, hopes and dreams faded. At that time I slowly found myself imprisoned inside my mind as the onset of my first psychotic break introduced me to a world riddled with mental illness that destroyed my life. The episodes were horrific as family members, friends and business associates watched the disease take its course. For years I felt like I had failed my family and friends and that my life was over. Even so I began to access care at a Stanislaus County Regional outpatient facility.

Recovery Happens: Peer Support

My world changed as I listened and learned from others who seemed to have risen above their destructive and humiliating past. I began my first step

into service work as I helped to provide coffee and warm space at a local drop-in center. The volunteer tasks were minimal yet I began to feel a sense of belonging and really felt the unity amongst my peers. My service benefits were twofold. Not only was I helping others in their

*“I have become through
my life’s experiences a
better man.”*

quest for sobriety but also for the first time I too remained sober. Now educated on the facts about sobriety my life took on new meaning. This service work, backed by a strong conviction to follow my psychiatrist’s direction, proved very beneficial in opening the gates to freedom. Armed with a vision of hope and a reluctance to remain on Social Security, I chose to volunteer. My first mental health volunteer job was during the development of a new conceptual Stanis-

laus county mental health program, Wellness Recovery Center. We answered calls for peers and facilitated recovery support groups at a variety of locations including inpatient psychiatric hospital settings. I soon achieved purpose as a peer mentor. The position raised my self-esteem and fired my imagination. Now my career has expanded into a position with Stanislaus County as the Behavioral Health and Recovery Service Family Advocate.

Reintegration: Community

I set high goals for my education and received full scholarships at the junior college level. I served as a teacher’s aide and received recognition as a goodwill ambassador to the college due to my efforts to enroll others. I have just finished my third year of study at California State

Continued on page 9

How I Feel About Me

I am almost 50 years old and I am in recovery for manic depression, anxiety, and PTSD from a spinal injury that left me partially crippled. I have good days and bad days. I am working hard on my plan and I am looking forward to starting peer advocacy and graduating with my certificate. If all goes well, and I am stable, I will be returning home to my husband in Red-

ding. My past is horrible and I try to leave it in the past. I focus on day by

“...wherever I go there is a way to succeed in what I have planned.”

day issues and am making progress. The Hope Center is a big part of my

recovery and has been a God send for the last year. I have learned a lot and am excited to learn more about peer advocacy. Life is becoming organized and manageable and I feel better about everything. Being around people that are in similar positions helps me feel not alone, and that where ever I go there is a way to succeed in what I have planned.

Carla N.
Humboldt County

Mental illness has affected all aspects of my life's journey. My forty year struggle with mental illness can be characterized by thirteen words: tortuous, fearful, obsessive, intense, fascinating, joyous, spiritual, manic, impulsive, depressive, paranoid, schizoid, and shameful. Easy and boring do not come to mind. Much has occurred: I have had to study my past so I could forgive it and let go of blame; I have

“I have learned faith in life and love are necessary for therapy to work.”

sought out proper therapy and effective medications and I battle with myself to find the most helpful ways forward. In so doing I have learned faith in life and love are necessary for therapy to work; finding the right medicines and sticking with a routine is

Persistence

vital; belief in God makes the mental illness journey less lonely.

My name is Chuck H-. I am 65 years old. I had my first psychotic break at the age of 24; my last at 63. In between I had 6 psychiatric hospitalizations, several panicked runs to the ER, and a 51/50 call. I have been diagnosed as: cyclothamic, manic depressive, paranoid schizophrenic, depressed, Bipolar with PTSD, and finally schizoaffective bi polar type with shades of PTSD. It seems like the correct diagnosis is a combination of all the previous diagnoses. I am delighted to say the cocktail of medications I am now taking have been working for two years. It took 38 years for me to finally get the correct medications, partly due to my resistance to taking medications and partly because the new atypical antipsychotics had not yet been discovered.

In the course of 40 years I tried to

live my life as fully as I could. I taught elementary school for twelve years; I taught writing for a community college as a part-time instructor for twenty years; I taught English in Japan for two separate years; I published two books of fiction and am now finishing a memoir about my struggle with mental illness. I am most proud of my role as house dad to our four children.

All those years except the last year and a half were spent in a terrible fear of when the next psychotic break would come. Every day was its own kind of night mare. I lived life as if I had to hide my mental illness from everyone, even my family or else the nightmare would grow even worse. I didn't begin living well with mental illness until I began my relationship with Lassen Aurora Network, a peer support organization. Little by little I shed the shame I felt for having a condition I could not prevent. I am no longer ashamed for being who I am.

Chuck H.
Lassen County

Hope and Recovery

Continued from page 8

University at Stanislaus, participating in a leadership development program, and am closely approaching my bachelor degree in Social Sciences. The long road of reconstruction filled with heartache and feelings of uselessness has now subsided. I have become through my life's experiences a better man. My example of strong recovery and perseverance has set the tone for others who may struggle on their re-

spective paths to freedom. My life is full of passion and through my production company I have raised thousands of dollars for charity and developed a widely recognized Peer Recovery Art Project Incorporated. I hold a teaching certificate in the NAMI Peer to Peer as well as Train the Provider programs and speak regularly at NAMI gatherings. I focus even harder on my recovery to try to be a model for others. I believe in recovery from mental illness, I live it and I share it!

John B.
Stanislaus County

Do you have a story of recovery that you would like to share? Contact the MHSOAC to obtain the submission form and to submit your story by:

Email:

MHSOAC@dmh.ca.gov or

Fax: 916-445-8696

Attention: Communications

A Picture's Worth

The Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission would like to thank all the artists who submitted their work to us. These are just a few of the outstanding pieces we received.



“Untitled”
Ruth W.
Placer County



“Indian Woman”
Timothy T.
San Bernardino County



“Spiderphant”
Dave M.
San Joaquin County



“Strength Within”
Dianne M.
Sacramento County

*Are you interested in having your artwork displayed in Sacramento at the MHSOAC building?
For more information, please contact us at:
MHSOAC@dmh.ca.gov, Attention: Art Displays*



"Samurai Tasered"
James C.
Stanislaus County



"Dante's Comedia"
Mark D.
San Mateo County



"City Scape"
Michael J.
Los Angeles County



"Addiction"
Natalie P.
San Bernardino County



"Mental Health Community"
Sheila D.
San Bernardino County

Index of Submissions

Artwork

Juan A., Napa County,
Blue Eyes, 12

David B., San Diego County,
Serenity Soup, 5

Fernando B., San Diego County,
Sunset, 5

Dawn C., Riverside County,
Clematis, 2

James C., Stanislaus County,
Samurai Tasered, 11

Mark D., San Mateo County,
Dante's Comedia, 11

Sheila D., San Bernardino County,
Mental Health Community, 11

Marisa F., San Bernardino County,
Little Girl, 4

Claire G., Santa Clara County,
Madonna, Joseph, and Infant Jesus,
6

Gabriel G., San Bernardino
County, *Hands*, 2

Margo G., Fresno County,
Flower Pot and The Pathway, 1, 3



“Blue Eyes”
Juan A.
Napa County

Michael J., Los Angeles County,
City Scape, 10

Cindy M., San Bernardino County,
Lighthouse, 6

Cynthia M., Fresno County,
My Family and First Love, 7

Dave M., San Joaquin County,
Spiderphant, 10

Dianne M., Sacramento County,
Strength Within, 10

Sandy M., Riverside County,
Woman's Face, 4

Natalie P., San Bernardino County,
Addiction, 11

James R., Santa Clara County,
Abstract, 12

Timothy T., San Bernardino
County, *Indian Woman*, 10

Valerie V., Los Angeles County,
Art School, 7

Ruth W., Placer County,
Untitled, 10

Poetry

Michael B., Alameda County,
Love Is, 7

Aliete G., Los Angeles County,
The Grooming Hour, 4

Barbie G., Sonoma County,
Messages, 4

MHSOAC
Mental Health Services
Oversight and Accountability Commission

1300 17th Street, Suite 1000
Sacramento, CA 95811
www.dmh.ca.gov/MHSOAC/
916-445-8696
Fax: 916-445-4927

Email:
MHSOAC@dmh.ca.gov

Robyn G., Ventura County,
Snapdragons, 3

Kippi K., San Bernardino County,
Not Just a Gift was Given, 6

Vivian D.L., San Bernardino
County, *A New Day*, 5

Giovanni M., Monterey County,
Accentuate the Positive, 5

Andrée R., Alameda County,
Twenty, 6

Galeladi R., Humboldt County,
Imagine, 3

Valerie V., Los Angeles County,
Art School, 7

Success Stories

John B., Stanislaus County,
Hope and Recovery, 8-9

Lorie B.E., San Bernardino County,
*A Journey of Recovery Leading Me
Back to Work*, 8

Chuck H., Lassen County,
Persistence, 9

Carla N., Humboldt County,
How I Feel About Me, 9



“Abstract”
James R.
Santa Clara County

All submitted artwork and writing are kept in the possession of the MHSOAC and are only displayed in publications released by the MHSOAC. All parties wishing to use the artwork and writing will need to contact the MHSOAC for permission.