

- My name is Grace Santillano. My professional degree is in Leadership and Organizational Management.

And I currently serve as a Staff Assistant II for DMH's Women's Community Reintegration Services Program.

- We talk about integration of DHS, DMH, and DPH services. But we often neglect to talk about integration of our jails, our prisons, our juvenile halls, and our other facilities where cycles of harm faced by our most vulnerable populations have a bigger price tag than a cost to the taxpayers: It is a tax on our humanity and spirit.

Just to share with you my world and clients and families that I work with. 17 percent of the inmates in LA County's jails have a severe mental illness, for instance. Yet, 95 percent of the inmates with mental illness have offended before, and will cycle in and out of jails. Sadly, inmates with mental illness are also far more likely to suffer sexual and/or physical assault while in jail. This only compounds the challenges before them once released.

- Diversion of corrections involved individuals to community based programs and services succeeds by providing access to services that are effective in helping those seeking to manage mental illness, substance abuse; helping those who have cycled in and out of jails and prisons. This means the involvement of nurses, substance abuse counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, vocational rehabilitation specialists, etc. In other words, it requires an integrated LA County Health Agency that empowers and supports our work.

When we talk about being the *employer of choice*, we're talking about the mission, the staffing, the structure, and the conditions that produce the best possible outcomes for our patients and clients. When we come into this line of work, we are motivated by our love for helping other people, devoted to science; passionate about the difference that this work can make in peoples' lives. The work we do is vital. We are needed, and those who need us, deserve us at our best.

- Through our partnership and integration efforts, I believe and see that we are headed in the right direction. We're on a path of reducing the same individual from coming in and out of jail recidivism through coordinated care, case management, cognitive behavior training, adult development programs, and education that leads to employment. Our approaches are changing, because we now have ongoing opportunities to both troubleshoot, and act with a take-charge attitude.

Embracing culture change is key. And we, those of us who are involved with partnership and integration, are the ones driving it. There is no mystery to any of this. But there is a lot of work that needs to be done. And there are a lot of opportunities to plug in. Give your issues, your passions, your specialties the time and attention that they deserve:

Get involved. Thank you.