

# DAILY REPUBLIC

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FAIRFIELD-SUISUN, CALIFORNIA

99 CENTS

## Center works on day-to-day mental health recovery



(Conner Jay/Daily Republic)

By Heather Ah San

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VALLEJO — It was a Thursday morning at the Caminar Wellness Recovery Center and the atmosphere was light and happy.

It was Valentine's Day and the clients were excited for a big party. They eagerly awaited their chance to play bingo, take part in the raffle and spend time relaxing. The room was dressed in reds, whites and other warm colors just for the occasion.

Kenneth Langill, a program coordinator for Caminar, started out the day checking in the clients and asking them what their goal was for the day.

Some clients had small goals, such as to have fun at the party. One client told Langill he wanted to cure his voices. Another told him he just wanted to make it to Caminar every day.

"That's a goal in itself is just coming to the center," he told his clients.

Caminar is a nonprofit organization that has helped people with disabilities for 40-plus years in Solano, San Mateo and Butte counties. Caminar Wellness Recovery Center, located in Vallejo, serves as a drop-in center for mentally ill clients.

The center is tucked away in a small building on Tuolumne Street. Inside, there's no cliché white padded walls, no straightjackets and no dim lighting. The room is well-lit with natural light and the clients can roam freely within the main room and outdoor patios. On a holiday such as Valentine's Day, they're mostly calm and happy, Langill said.

"(The clients) know that they're safe here," he said. "It's clean, airy and inviting."

Not every day at the center is easy. For many clients, showing up is hard work. On Mondays and Wednesdays, the center works with clients who have been diagnosed with mental illnesses. On Tuesdays and Thursday, staff works with clients

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with a dual diagnoses of mental illness and drug and/or alcohol addiction.

Staff members tackle different aspects of the client's life each day, from their mental to physical health. Some staff members help clients communicate through music or art therapy. The structure, day to day, is pretty loose, Langill said.

Langill said Caminar's staff really put an emphasis on the client's self-sufficiency. They recognize that the mentally ill have rights, that they have the right to stop their medication or change doctors.

"I treat them normally, with respect," he said. "They respond really well to that."

The clients are also treated with positive attention, Langill said. They're treated for their birthdays, taken on outings and once a year are honored at the annual Cammie Awards.

At the big Valentine's Day party, client Davilyn Parker wandered around the center, grinning after she won a giant stuffed dog from the Caminar staff.

"This is Oscar," she said, holding out his paw. "I'm going to keep him forever."

Parker was eager to introduce everyone to Oscar. She was even more eager to tell people about her educational plans.

"I'm going back to school," she said with a big smile. "You shouldn't stop people from learning."

Another client, Jaime Lazcanl, was proud to show off his artwork, inspired by the cartoon "The Flash." While explaining his love of the cartoon, he slipped in bits of own life story.

He never met his father, but his mother played a big role in his life until she died 15 years ago. In high school, he started acting out, becoming angry and violent. What's helped his mind, he said, is medication and "The Flash."

"Art is my therapy," he said. "My dream is to fight crime like ('The Flash')."

What Langill has noticed while working at Caminar is that most of these clients want to be better. They want to have pets, have relationships and be independent, he said.

Toward the end of client check-in on Valentine's Day, Langill was happy to hear one client's goal for the day.

"Do the best you can," he repeated. "I love that."

The Caminar Wellness Recovery Center is celebrating Easter holiday Friday with a luncheon, games and more. For information on Caminar, visit [www.caminar.org](http://www.caminar.org).

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