On a Friday afternoon in June, a 23-year-old killed his brother and father, set the house on fire and went on a shooting rampage that ended at Santa Monica College. There were five fatalities and four others were injured before police shot and killed him in the campus library.

Because of Didi Hirsch’s longstanding relationship with the college, administrators immediately asked if we could send clinicians to talk with traumatized students and faculty members. Among those needing help were several school counselors who were in the counseling center when the gunman passed through it. To administrators’ relief, a large team of mental health professionals from our Mar Vista, Metro, Inglewood, Taper, Glendale and Sepulveda sites gathered at the school Monday morning. By the end of the day, our clinicians conducted private, hour-long counseling sessions with more than 40 students, faculty and staffers, who described a range of symptoms including headaches, nightmares and severe feelings of vulnerability and guilt. They also gave information and resources to at least 30 others at the vigil for the victims.

“Our main goal was listening, accepting and responding to what they had to say in an empathic way, educating them about what’s a normal reaction to an abnormal and traumatic event and providing them with resources for additional help,” says Robert Chernoff, PhD, Didi Hirsch’s director of psychology training.

“While the L.A. County Department of Mental Health and UCLA later provided support, school administrators were grateful for Didi Hirsch’s quick and nimble response,” Chernoff says.

“One of the worst things in a mental health crisis is that there are often long wait times before people receive any services,” continues Chernoff. “Because we were able to provide so many clinicians on short order, people didn’t have to wait for help.”
Whenever a tragedy occurs, we look for ways to minimize future danger. This is healthy coping. It prompts us to take preventive measures like bolting bookcases to the wall after an earthquake and taking self-defense classes after a mugging.

But sometimes our actions can be misguided, even destructive. Calling for more funding for mental health after mass shootings is a case in point. Not that we don't need more funding, but pairing that need with mass murder reinforces the stereotype that individuals with mental illness are dangerous.

That stereotype is still far more prevalent than I imagined. After one mass shooting, I told a reporter that 60 million American adults have a diagnosable mental disorder, such as Attention Deficit-, Social Anxiety-, Obsessive Compulsive-, and Depressive Disorder to name just a few — and they are far more likely to be victims than assailants. The reporter responded, “Those are mental illnesses?”

Clearly, we have a lot of work to do before we erase stigma. In a recent Johns Hopkins’ survey, two-thirds of Americans said they would not want someone with serious mental illness as a neighbor. The media isn’t helping. A second Hopkins’ study showed that articles linking serious mental illness with mass shootings increased the belief that those with serious mental illness are more likely to be dangerous. I fear that negative media also will increase individuals’ reluctance to ask for help and deepen their shame.

There is another risk associated with calling for increases in mental health care funding to prevent mass homicides. There are about 20 to 30 instances of mass murder each year. That’s like asking mental health professionals to find a needle in a haystack. If these tragedies continue, there well could be a backlash, with naysayers calling for cuts in mental health funding because treatment doesn’t work.

If only there were a call for increased mental health funding 365 days a year and that call were paired with stories about successful treatment. There are millions out there. Mine is one of them. Yours very well may be, too.

Dr. Kita S. Curry
President/CEO

---

**Officers of the Board**

Michael C. Wierwille  
Chair

Carlos Garcia  
Executive Vice Chair

Laura Ornest  
Secretary

Gail Kamer Lieberfarb  
Treasurer

Janine B. Lichstein  
Vice Chair

Andrew E. Rubin  
Vice Chair

Cheri Renfroe Yousem  
Vice Chair

Martin J. Frank  
Immediate Past Chair

---

**Members of the Board**

Shawn Amos
Charlotte W. Fletcher, PhD
Thomas J. Han, DDS, FACD
Vera M. Jashni, EdD
Lee Leibman, PsyD
Stanley D. Lelewer
Howard M. Loeb
Todd M. Rubin
Philip B. Strauss, CPA

---

**Executive Staff**

Kita S. Curry, PhD  
President/CEO

Curley L. Bonds, MD, DFAPA  
Medical Director

Cynthia Bryan, SPHR  
VP, Human Resources

Rebecca J. Gaba, PhD, MFT  
VP, Best Practices

Michael Gassis  
VP, Operations

Lyn Morris, MFT  
VP, Clinical Operations

John P. McGann, CPA  
VP, Finance and Administration

Joel Safranek  
VP, Development
With “Don’t Throw Up, Throw Down!” as a rallying cry, UFC [Ultimate Fighting Championship] Women’s Bantamweight Champion Ronda Rousey held a training clinic to raise money for Via Avanta, our residential program for women, whose challenges often include eating disorders.

The two-time Olympian and world medalist in judo hosted the two-hour clinic at the Glendale Fight Club, where 30 participants paid $200 each to learn mat work, judo and Rousey’s signature arm bar move. With matching funds from Rousey, the clinic raised nearly $10,000 to fund treatment for the women at Via Avanta.

Rousey has spoken publically about her battle to overcome bulimia and her wish to help other young women with eating disorders. These women have the highest mortality rate associated with mental illness.

“We’re thrilled Ms. Rousey is on our team,” says Kita Curry, PhD, Didi Hirsch’s president and chief executive officer. “Not only is she a world champion, she’s a champion for women who need help.”

Didi Hirsch’s counselors may not be world-class singers, but they provided excellent back-up to pop music icon Lady Gaga during the Los Angeles leg of her Born to Be Brave concert tour earlier this year.

Invited by the diva’s Born This Way Foundation, Didi Hirsch counselors helped staff a two-day, pre-concert expo on January 20 and 21 that gave young fans ages 13-25 a chance to express their individuality, learn about volunteer opportunities and obtain mental health resources.

Didi Hirsch counselors Jennifer Reza, MFT, and Krista Carpenter, along with several volunteers, wore T-shirts with a Quick Response Code that users could photograph and download into browsers to link to our website.

Stationed in the expo’s “Dare to Care” pod, Jennifer and Krista met with about 400 “little monsters,” as Lady Gaga’s fans refer to themselves, and led several group discussions on bullying, suicide prevention, depression and other issues.

“About half of all mental health challenges emerge by age 14, so it’s important that young people feel comfortable seeking help,” Krista says. “The Lady Gaga expo was an effective and fun way to get out the word that help is available if you need it.”
Remembering Joe Wyatt

Joseph L. Wyatt, Jr., a Morrison & Foerster lawyer whose pro bono representation helped protect property bequeathed to Didi Hirsch’s Suicide Prevention Center, died April 15. He was 89. A consummate “people’s lawyer,” Wyatt spent hundreds of hours on the case, which involved a 57-year-old woman’s efforts to be declared the adopted daughter of her elderly landlord.

Known for his wit, humor, intelligence and humility, as well as his signature bow tie, Wyatt was one of California’s leading trust and estate lawyers for more than 50 years. He also gave his time, talent and resources to numerous organizations focused on children and education.

“Joe grew up in poverty; one of his first jobs was working in a coal mine,” says Kita Curry, PhD, Didi Hirsch’s president and chief executive officer. “His experience led to an abiding commitment to helping others — whether the cause be mental health, civil rights or poverty. He was truly one of a kind.”

Venice High Grad Turns Life Around

Ryan S. was a Venice High School sophomore with a daily pot smoking habit when authorities discovered a pipe in his backpack. To avoid suspension, he reluctantly agreed to enroll in IMPACT, a drug and alcohol diversion class facilitated by Didi Hirsch counselors.

“I thought of the class as a way to get out of biology once a week,” Ryan recalls. “I didn’t like being there and would smoke weed with a couple of my friends after the meetings.”

But the connections he made with other students, along with their discussions about stereotypes and how drugs affect the growing brain, changed his feelings about the group. He grew so fond of the Didi Hirsch IMPACT facilitator that he re-enrolled in his junior and senior years.

Now nearly three years sober, Ryan, 20, is a student at Santa Monica City College and an award-winning writer whose articles have appeared in The Corsair, his school newspaper, and The Huffington Post. The school-based groups that Ryan participated in were so successful that Didi Hirsch now offers similar groups at Santa Monica City College, Hamilton High School and Phoenix High School.

“Before IMPACT, I was angry at everything and definitely going down the wrong path,” Ryan says. “I’m one hundred percent positive I would still be smoking pot today if not for my counselor and the groups. I feel I owe them my life.”
When Lucas started acting out during class, ignoring his teacher and failing to turn in homework, school officials suggested the fifth-grade boy undergo testing for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

If they had known that Lucas’ mother was an Army reservist who had just left for a one-year deployment to Iraq, they might have been more sensitive to Lucas’ challenges in coping with separation from his mother and less likely to seek a diagnosis for his disruptive behavior.

When teachers and school administrators are armed with knowledge, military families thrive. That’s the lesson Didi Hirsch is taking to schools throughout Los Angeles’ South Bay/ Harbor region, a mostly civilian region that lacks many of the built-in resources found on large military bases.

“The Department of Defense does not keep track of service members and their families once they are out of the military,” says Erica Trejo, MFT, project coordinator for Didi Hirsch’s Military Families Are Resilient project. “As a result, we have many veterans in the civilian community whose children are not identified as military-connected, and who are sometimes misdiagnosed with ADHD or other disorders following a parent’s deployment, recent relocation or other stressors.”

Since our $1.6 million, four-year Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant project launched last year, Trejo has successfully persuaded several schools and district administrators to include a check box on school enrollment forms to identify military-connected children.

“Schools are one of the best places to find military-connected children because most of their day is spent there,” Trejo says. “But we are also reaching out to mental health care clinicians, day care workers, pastors and businesses to educate and train people throughout the community in more effective ways to build on the strengths of military families.”

Helping Military Children Succeed

In March of this year, large signs with the Suicide Crisis Line (877) 727-4747 were posted at all of the Blue Line stations and crossings. In partnership with Didi Hirsch’s Suicide Prevention Center, Metro took this action because more suicides occur along the Metro Blue Line than its other lines. Knowing there is help when one is in pain or worried about someone else works. Since the posting, several callers have shared that they found the Crisis Line number at the Blue Line. Three of the four deaths on the Metro Blue Line so far in 2013 have been suicides.
Music Matters at 2013 Erasing the Stigma Awards

We all have a song that gives voice to our pain, hopes and desires, a song that comforts us in our darkest moments and connects with us when we need it most,” says Shawn Amos, Didi Hirsch board member and Freshwire founder and CEO.

That’s why “Music Matters” was the theme, title and message of Didi Hirsch’s 2013 Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards ceremony on April 18, which Amos chaired.

Breaking previous attendance records and surpassing Didi Hirsch’s fundraising goals, the 17th annual Awards at the Beverly Hilton Hotel honored three musical greats whose work has helped eased the pain of people with mental illness and addiction and whose lives are testaments to overcoming adversity.

Leadership Awards went to record producer, composer and philanthropist Quincy Jones, whose Listen Up Foundation promotes international efforts to improve children’s health and wellbeing, and Jeff Greenberg, owner and chief executive officer of the legendary Village Studios. Greenberg’s interest in mental health and the challenges of substance abuse runs deep. He was an original board member of the Musicians Assistance Program (MAP), built a studio in Boyle Heights for the Los Angeles Youth Opportunities Movement and created mobile studios for disadvantaged youths.

Michael Angelakos, lead singer, songwriter and producer of the indie band Passion Pit, received this year’s Beatrice Stern Media Award for speaking openly on Twitter and Facebook about his challenges with bipolar disorder and for using social media to promote mental health awareness.

“Music Matters” included a moving performance by saxophonist Mindi Abair, accompanied by guitarist Ben Peeler. She performed Michael Jackson’s “Man in the Mirror” in honor of Jones, who produced the song.

Unable to attend because he was being inducted that evening into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Jones addressed the gathering in a pre-recorded video, noting that more than half of U.S. adults with serious mental health disorders don’t get the help they need.

“So many cry out for help only to find their cries falling on deaf ears,” Jones said. “But thank God for places like Didi Hirsch and their dedicated staff. You hear those cries and extend your hand to help those in need out of the darkness.”

Another Way Forward

A homeless mother coping with severe mental illness and substance use has few places to turn for the care she needs. Thanks to the support of Third District Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, Via Avanta will soon offer a unique solution in its newly remodeled wing.

At the end of November, it will launch an innovative program modeled after Project 50, which successfully brought chronically homeless men on Skid Row off the streets. The first of its kind in Los Angeles, Project 60 Women & Children will give equal attention – under one roof – to the mother’s sobriety and mental health, as well as the psychological needs of her children. Rapidly returning the family to permanent housing also will be a key element. Stay tuned for more details in the months ahead.
Garcelle Beauvais introducing Leadership Award honoree Quincy Jones.

Jeff Greenberg accepts the Leadership Award from presenter and long time friend Al Schmitt.

Event Chair and Board member Shawn Amos presents Michael Angelakos with the Beatrice Stern Media Award.
Harnessing the Power of Art

To build community awareness about mental health, Didi Hirsch launched two outreach projects – one for children and another for adults – that harness the power of art to express and transform feelings.

“GUS, the community tree,” is a mobile art exhibit containing nearly 200 laminated paper “leaves” created by Didi Hirsch clients between the ages of 2 and 18. The budding artists used markers, crayons and paint to creatively answer the question, “What does asking for help or therapy mean to me?”

Didi Hirsch’s Child and Family Services planted the seeds for GUS, which is an acronym for “Giving U Support,” on National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day in May. Now in full bloom, GUS has been on display at the Inglewood Public Library and the Crenshaw Farmer’s Market, where children and parents continue to contribute new “leaves.”

“GUS symbolizes that we are all connected,” says Katie Bryan, MFT lead clinical supervisor at the Inglewood Center. “GUS also lets kids know it’s okay to ask for help.”

To provide its adult clients with a creative outlet for self-expression, Didi Hirsch mounted an art show at the Veterans Memorial Building in Culver City that exhibited more than 100 paintings and drawings by clients and staff members from our Glendale, Inglewood and Culver City Wellness Centers.

Called “Reflections,” the art show attracted a large gathering of client-artists, their families and friends and community members, who enjoyed live musical performances at the opening on May 9.

“We are trying to create opportunities for our Wellness Center members to feel like a part of the community, to integrate them in a way that erases stigma,” says Rachel Marks, PhD, lead clinical supervisor for Didi Hirsch’s three Wellness Centers. “Our members and staff worked together side by side to make the art and put together the food and entertainment. It was truly a fun, inspiring and uplifting event.”

Artist, their families and patrons at “Reflections” art show.
Suicidal people tend to feel frightened, embarrassed or even ashamed the first time they reach out to a crisis hotline. Imagine how difficult it would be to make that call if you needed a third person to speak to the crisis counselor on your behalf.

Deaf people, who typically use a relay operator to place calls to hearing people, report they feel uncomfortable calling suicide hotlines because they need an interpreter who has the proper tools to communicate with the crisis counselor. The shortage of mental health providers who are fluent in American Sign Language only adds to their sense of isolation and desperation.

To make it easier for the deaf to get help in a crisis, Didi Hirsch recently launched CrisisText, a confidential and secure telephone texting service that allows users to communicate directly with trained suicide prevention counselors 24/7. The Orange County Health Care Agency’s Prevention and Intervention Division funded the service.

To reach the Suicide Prevention Center, users text the word “hearme” to the number 839863 and wait for a confirming message. The user’s entire conversation with the crisis counselor is conducted over text messages.

“Our crisis line is one of the busiest in the nation, with our counselors responding to more than 52,000 calls a year,” says Suicide Prevention Center division director Robert Stohr, MFT. “We are so pleased to have technology that allows us to communicate more effectively with people who are deaf and will continue to find innovative ways to overcome whatever challenges we face in providing support to people in crisis.”

Advancing the Field

Below are some recent presentations given by Didi Hirsch staff at state and national conferences.

**Services to Military Families**
Rebecca Gaba, PhD, and Erica Trejo, MFT – National Child Traumatic Stress Network Annual Conference

**Common Metrics for California’s Suicide Crisis Lines**
Lyn Morris, MFT, and Georgina Parra, PhD – CalMHSA Statewide Evaluation Experts Team

**Creating a Statewide Suicide Prevention Network and Increasing Local/Regional Capacity**
Lyn Morris, MFT – CalMHSA Statewide Coordination Workgroup

**Innovative Training Approaches to Suicide Assessment**
Sandri Kramer – American Association of Suicidology National Conference

**Call Efficacy: How Do We Know We Are Making A Difference?**
Sandri Kramer – National Association of Crisis Center Directors Webinar

**Implementing Imminent Risk Policies and Promoting Collaboration**
Sandri Kramer – National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Network Webinar

**Practice-Based Research Network for Behavioral Health**
Rebecca Gaba, PhD – USC Annual International Pathways Conference

**Addiction Workshop**
RuthAnn Markusen, MS, RAS, CADC-II – Baha’i Network State Conference on AIDS, Sexuality, Addiction and Abuse

**Enhanced Recovery**
Stephen Fine, MFT, and RuthAnn Markusen, MS, RAS, CADC-II–Dual Eligibles Care Coordination National Conference
The stigma that has made suicide such a taboo subject is fading. This year, more than 2,000 walkers, runners and volunteers came together on September 22 at Didi Hirsch’s 15th annual Alive and Running 5K to raise awareness about suicide and the resources available when an individual is contemplating suicide or worried about someone else.

A record-setting 96 teams ran or walked the Westchester course wearing colorful T-shirts bearing photos and names of loved ones lost to suicide. Several student groups, including the color guard from Walter Reed Middle School and Redondo Junior High’s ROTC, were back to help out. Sponsored by Aiko’s Team, which completed its 10th walk/run this year, the Chikara Daiko Japanese Taiko drummers set the pace again. Marilyn Nabori, a facilitator for our suicide bereavement groups and crisis line volunteer, organized the team after her 14-year-old daughter, Aiko, killed herself in 2003.

Sponsors donated everything from water, pastries and snow cones to an invigorating warm-up and a raffled six-week boot camp. Between the teams’ fundraising and our sponsors’ contributions, Alive and Running raised more than $240,000 for the Suicide Prevention Center’s ever-expanding services, such as innovative groups for suicide attempters and text crisis counseling for the deaf.

The names and photos of more than 260 youth and adults lost to suicide were inscribed on banners and quilts. This is an especially meaningful part of the 5K. Too often in the past, people ceased to talk about their parents, spouses, children and siblings because of the stigma associated with suicide.

Among the walkers and runners who made their way up and back along La Tijera Boulevard, just north of Los Angeles International Airport, were Jean and John Toh, who walked in honor of their son Brandon who died two years ago. After the 5K, their daughter Shauna came on stage and spoke about her brother, saying, “We lost him physically, but like all survivors, we want him to be remembered.”
Nearly 1,700 participants enjoyed the day and events at this year’s Alive & Running 5K Walk/Run for Suicide Prevention.

Runners and walkers leave the starting line at the 15th annual Alive & Running 5K.

Sheriff Lee Baca crosses the finish line in support of the Suicide Prevention Center.

Children of all ages heading out on the Kiddie 1K.

Team Limelight captain Kristine Olsen (l) with actor Patrick Warburton and singer Terri Nunn.
INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Didi Hirsch Responds after Santa Monica Shooting  
(page 1)

Mixed Martial Arts Champ Fights Eating Disorder  
(page 3)

Helping Military Children Succeed  
(page 5)

Music Matters  
(page 6)

Who is GUS?  
(page 8)

Alive and Running  
(page 10)

MISSION STATEMENT
Didi Hirsch transforms lives by providing quality mental health and substance abuse services in communities where stigma or poverty limit access.

YOU CAN HELP
Please support our programs and help those in need by donating to Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services. Make a donation online at www.didihirsch.org or call (310) 751-5455.