



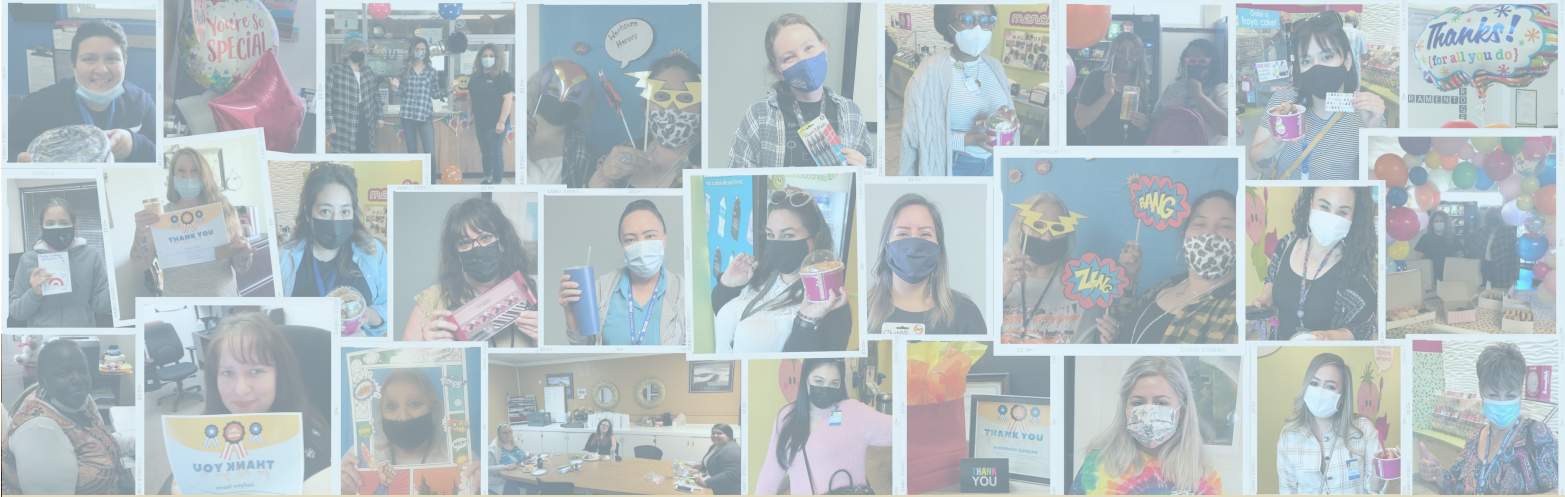
# THE LOOP

A COLLECTION OF STORIES FROM AROUND CALIFORNIA

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Every March, we are proud to recognize not just **Women's History Month**, but the contributions of the amazing women in our lives. This month-long celebration is accompanied by other key observances such as **International Women's Day** on March 8th, the precursor to Women's History Month that was first observed in 1911 as well as the **Transgender Day of Visibility** on March 31st in which we celebrate the beautiful and honest act of embracing one's true self.

Despite the countless contributions made by so many amazing women from activists to athletes and from teachers to inventors and other visionaries and trailblazers in between, the fact that we have a Women's History Month is proof that women have been and in a lot of cases, are still disproportionately affected by harmful societal traditions. Until the day comes where women not only have all of the same rights as men but are also measured by the same yardstick, we will still have a lot of work to do. We must challenge the status quo. How can we tolerate women being viewed or treated differently just because they don't want to get married, want to keep their family name after marriage, don't want to or can't have children, want a career, and don't desire to be a stay-at-home housewife or will be marginalized if they do? In what place in our mind can we even find a corner where it is ok for a woman to be victimized by emotional, physical, or sexual violence or for someone to gaslight them into feeling shame for speaking up? Why would we not want to pay women the same wage as their male counterparts? These certainly aren't new questions or thoughts, but we need to stop thinking about

them and instead, act on them. Again, we must challenge the status quo, which isn't easy, but in most cases, is the right thing to do.

While a major emphasis of the month is on recognizing prominent female figures from our past, present, and future - we cannot forget that we have everyday women who do amazing things every single day! For example, I wouldn't be who I am or where I am if it wasn't for my mother, and am honored to think of her during this time. To the mothers, daughters, sisters, leaders, and mentors within our WestCare Family, we extend our heartfelt appreciation for your contributions, sacrifices, guidance, and commitment to our mission and those that we serve. We value you and honor your stories!

On the thought of appreciation, I cannot end a March message without also acknowledging the efforts of so many within our global WestCare Family who made **Employee Appreciation Day** on March 5th an impactful one for those who have chosen to lend their experience, wisdom, and talents to our cause! Within California alone, we saw many events held as a way to say thanks, but I'll let the stories featured within the issue speak for themselves!

Until next time, stay safe and take care,



*Shawn L. Jee*  
Deputy COO - Western Region



#WESTCARECA



## Women's History Month Spotlight

Meet **Gabriela Espinosa-McNiel**, Director of Marketing and Procurement for WestCare California! As the director of marketing, Gabriela's work touches many aspects of WestCare's mission. Setting up interviews with local press? Organizing volunteer recruitment? Preparing pandemic protocols for WestCare? Gabriela's got it!

Even with all she does for WestCare, some of Gabriela's most remarkable impacts are a result of her downtime. She's a busy mom, so spare moments are limited.

"When my boys were diagnosed with autism, I knew nothing about it," Gabriela remembers. "I threw myself into learning all that I could about how to help them find their voices."

Before joining WestCare, Gabriela's health insurance company had denied therapy for her autistic sons.

The corporate decision seemed unjust — so she took on the insurer. "It was only after taking the insurance company to the Department of Managed Healthcare that they overturned each denial and granted services," she explained.

But she didn't stop there. Gabriela pressed the issue all the way to state capitol, forcing the insurance company to commit to independent medical reviews of their autism therapy service denials.

Gabriela's struggle to access proper medical care for her children helped assure that no other families would have to go through the same mess.

**"I found myself in Sacramento speaking in front of people who oversee health insurance companies. My voice cracked because I was sharing about my family. But from this meeting came SB 946, the California Autism Insurance Mandate. I'm proud I never gave up or gave in. I don't know where we would be if I didn't speak up, fight and cry - oh, did I cry."**

Senate Bill 946 aimed to eliminate delays and denials of coverage for autism treatment, ensuring autism therapy options for all Californians. On March 7th, 2014, the bill was codified into law.

After six years with WestCare, Gabriela is still pushing for autism rights "I continue to support my family and be the best mom/advocate I can be for them, and those who ask for my help," she says.

"Surviving those therapy schedules, early intervention services, countless assessments, IEP meetings, IPP meetings, work, and home life has never been easy," she explains, "But it has all been worth it."

When she's not advocating for healthcare coverage, Gabriela loves to dabble in home improvement. "YouTube is my best friend," Gabriela says, "I find how-to videos on everything from fixing my lawnmower to repurposing furniture."

**That's Gabriela Espinosa-McNiel:** a dynamo of self-help and how-to knowledge.





### 3/17: Jennifer Celebrates 10 Years of Recovery!

Every St Patrick's Day marks a special observance - the 10th recovery birthday for one of our amazing Women's Counselors at our **MLK Residential** facility in Fresno, **Jennifer Childers**!

To help her celebrate just how far she has come in her journey, the clients that she serves decorated her door! Jennifer, we appreciate you bringing your experience, positivity, and guidance to continue uplifting the human spirit to those around you each and every day.

After sharing her anniversary via social media, we received dozens of great comments from current clients and alumni! Here's just a few:

“  
**Congratulations, Jennifer! I learned some very important things from you that I carry with me every single day! Thank you so much for turning your past struggles into a way of giving back to people like me! I promise to do the same! - Erin**  
 ”

“  
**Happy Soberversary, beautiful. I'm super proud and happy for you Jennifer and I'm sure your kids are too. Being sober is a blessing and I'm sure that having 10 years is extravagant. I can't wait for that day to come for myself. Continue reaching for the stars, beautiful. You got this and so many more years to come. - Nena**  
 ”

“  
**I couldn't have completed my 6 month-long treatment program without this beautiful lady's support! Now, I have 2 years and 9 months clean and sober and am grateful every day for my new life. Congratulations, Jennifer! - Nichol**  
 ”



## Health and Wellness: Alcohol and Increased Hospitalizations During COVID-19

Submitted by Mark Leanhart,  
 Program Director, Fresno Admissions  
 and Adult Outpatient

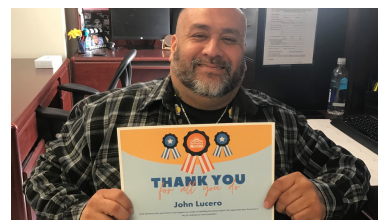
April is **Alcohol Awareness Month**. In previous years, I have shared commonly reported statistics published about alcohol abuse and its effects here in the United States, but various sources are now reporting significant increases in hospitalizations for alcohol-related conditions in relation to alcohol use during the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond hospitalizations, "hazardous drinking," reportedly rose from 21% in April of 2020 to 40.7% in September of last year, and alcohol dependence rose from 7.9% to 29.1% of those surveyed utilizing the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT).

According to the **Philly Voice**, leading liver disease specialists and psychiatrists nationwide are reporting an explosion of hospitalizations beyond what was seen pre-COVID. Medical experts attribute the hospitalizations to feelings of despair and crisis couple with increased drinking in response to conditions such as isolation, unemployment and uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

Specialists who report that their patients that had sustained recovery for extended periods and that had seen decreases in their liver disease

and medical conditions for years prior to the pandemic have been suddenly hospitalized in troubling numbers and with severe consequences including death. These increases in problematic drinking and related health conditions are being seen among youth, women, and men in a recent survey from all 50 states. During these difficult times, it is always good to remember that AA, NA and many other specialty support groups are available online for a supportive community experience. Recently, I came across the website, **meetup.com**, which has wide-ranging support groups ranging from topics of anxiety to wellness and beyond. In troubling times, it is helpful to be able to reach out for such support and to work in a solution-focused way towards greater wellness and health.

To find virtual support groups in your area, please visit:  
<https://www.meetup.com/topics/support-group/us/>





## Hygiene Drive at Belmont Health and Wellness

**Devon Ramirez**, CADC 1, Counselor at our **Belmont Health and Wellness** facility organized a hygiene drive among their **Admissions** and **Adult Outpatient** staff to donate care kits to the individuals that they serve who are currently experiencing homelessness.

In total, she raised \$90 and was able to purchase enough items for 10 bags! Each bag included items ranging from dry shampoo to toothbrushes, toothpaste, socks, facemasks, deodorant and more! Thank you to our staff who donated and to Devon for organizing this generous effort!

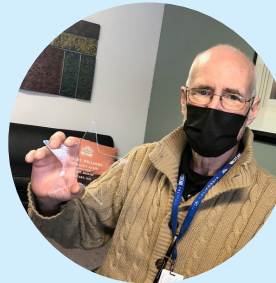
## Organizing an effort? Let us know!

We have a great group of supporters on our WestCare California social media pages - Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter is where we are most active! Let our marketing team know about a donation drive you are organizing and we can assist in sharing information to help drum up donations for clients and community members.

## Congratulations Robert

**Recipient of the January Community-Based Employee of the Month Award:**

**Robert Williams, Men's Counselor, MLK Residential**



*"I see him constantly step up to help his team. He covers groups without hesitation, is empathetic and caring, and takes pride in his job. I see Robert constantly wanting to learn and will talk with clients in the hallway by just generally checking in with them."*

**Jenny Magdaleno, Program Director, MLK Residential**



## Kudos to Erin and Cleadus!

**Housing Matcher and Deputy Administrator**

We'd like to give a special shout out to **Erin and Cleadus Shelton** for winning the title of "America's Favorite Dog" via a public vote for their dog, **Penelope**! As part, she received a two page feature in the February/March 2021 issue of Dogster Magazine! Congratulations, Penelope!

## Submit A Story for The Loop

The Loop newsletter wouldn't be possible without the regular submissions that we receive from staff! Whether it's a success story or an event, we'd love to see it! Please send any high-quality pictures (Non-identifying if of clients) and a brief summary to: [marketing@westcare.com](mailto:marketing@westcare.com)



**Benjamin Hernandez**  
Social Media Specialist



**Justin Kamimoto**  
Creative Services Manager



**Gabriela McNiel**  
Director of Marketing & Procurement



**Michael Mygind**  
Marketing Specialist