

**Sue Levin, Executive Director**

**Edges**

Our theme for the 2008 Annual Meeting and Report is: Edges. Do you feel on edge lately? Do you experience people around you being a bit “edgy”? Is this why we chose the word “edges” for our Annual Meeting today? I don’t think so, at least not intentionally...

The Houston Galveston Institute was founded on cutting edge ideas in the field of mental health—particularly the revolutionary clinical edges of working with families and using teams. Our work has continued on the cutting edge, now growing our theoretical and practice edges in the area of collaboration and community. Why do we need to be at these edges? To find ways to work with people, their problems and situations, that are not served by the clinical approaches and treatment ‘paradigms’, that are currently available and popular. Unfortunately, as you probably know, people keep falling through the cracks and not getting what they need.

A brief example, imagine you are Diana, a child of immigrants, living on the edge of poverty, her father left the family the day she was born. A survivor of childhood sexual abuse, Diana used drugs, alcohol, and cutting behaviors to escape her pain for many years. Diana dropped out of school in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Since getting sober at about 19, she continued to cut herself, entered a series of abusive relationships and moved in and out of her family home. Diana’s family takes advantage of her when she is there, expecting her to clean, cook, and care for her ill mother. She considered suicide, frequently, as she could not find avenues to escape her difficult life. Diana has been involuntarily hospitalized several times, after suicide attempts.

Diana found HGI through another agency that could not meet her needs, which they assessed as severe. HGI has provided therapy for Diana for over two years, now, despite her frequent inability to pay for her sessions. Though she has attempted suicide once during this time, she agreed to enter a hospital voluntarily for the first time in her life. She also agreed to try medication to see if she would

benefit, again for the first time. The road is still very rocky, however is changing in positive ways. Diana says that HGI is the only place where she can be honest and trust that her therapist is being honest with her. She talks about wanting to die, and even about plans and dates for possible suicide attempts.

What would you do if you felt as desperate as Diana and couldn't talk to a therapist without getting hospitalized against your will? Current treatment protocols for suicide, as well as a few other severe problems, demand client compliance or else... Diana needs therapy that goes beyond what the current status quo is in mental health. We must think "outside the box" to continue our work with her. We must push the edges of theory and practice, or people like Diana will suffer and die.

Many of our clients are on the edge of despair, the edge of life and death, the edge of divorce, the edge of homelessness, or becoming chronic treatment failures and labeled mentally ill. We work on multiple edges- our own theory and practice edges, our clients' emotional edges, our organization's financial edges, the community's margins. We work with people who are often considered unreachable, beyond help, undeserving of our respect, time and efforts. It is scary on the edge, sometimes, for all of us, however it is also the place we must be to be with our clients and to move to a new place.

Today we will talk about some of these edges with you, as we review the highlights of 2008 and the directions we are moving in 2009.

### **Catherine King - Program Manager**

#### **Working with Those in the Edges of Our Community**

I would like to tell you more about the work that is provided by HGI therapists. Much of this work is being provided in community settings to individuals who would not necessarily come into our offices: Who are they? And why would they not come here? Maybe they do not have transportation, maybe riding the bus with 2 or 3 young children makes coming into the office an overwhelming obstacle.

So what are some of these programs that serve individuals on the edges of our communities?

One site is Ibn Sina Health Clinic, providing counseling for immigrants and refugees at a medical clinic in southwest Houston. Another is our work for the Office of the Attorney General, here in Houston, and in Dallas, working with parents in conflict over child support or custody issues. We have our Rolling Conversations Project (RCP), our mobile mental health unit, the RCP that travels to four sites around Houston. One of the RCP's sites is the Southwest Multi-Service Center serving immigrants and refugees, primarily Spanish speaking at this time. Another RCP site is at Cornerstone Apartments off FM 1960, serving individuals affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and now Ike. Another RCP site is Foerster Elementary School, providing counseling to children, some of their parents, and now to a few of the teachers. Our last RCP site is at McNamara Elementary School, again providing counseling to children and some of their parents. This site is a partnership with Communities in Schools.

Another program in which we see clients both here and at the northwest office is through the Domestic Relations Office of Harris County, working with children whose parents are experiencing conflict after divorce.

We continue to see Open Community clients here in this office and at the northwest office that come to HGI through referrals from various sources. Approximately 39% of these clients pay \$25 dollars or less per session.

The last HGI's cutting edge program that I want to mention is the Social Engagement groups; groups that encourage and promote the development of community. These are:

- Monthly Community meetings at Cornerstone Apartments
- A Stepping class for youth at Bethel's Place
- And a scrapbooking group at Bethel's Place.

I would like to conclude with a comment from one of the individuals who attended the scrapbooking group, a woman who joined the group to begin to build a community for herself; who left New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, with her daughter, her granddaughter and the clothes that they were wearing. She lost her daughter to a car accident two weeks prior to joining the scrapbooking group. When asked by another group member how she was doing she stated, *"I'd rather be here doing this than sitting alone at home doing nothing."*

Saliha Bava will speak next about Training and Research.

**Saliha Bava - Associate Director**

**Growing Edges: Training, Research & Consultation**

I invite you to take a moment to ponder these questions:

- What is mental health?
- How do we not reduce people to their problems and illness?
- How do we honor life's relational challenges and cultural differences & not label it as an illness?

Here at HGI we continue to explore these questions and push the edges of the existing mental health frameworks in our training, research and consultation practices.

In 2008 we offered 19 training programs and trained 251 people which includes five of our interns and 8 international trainees including a Fulbright scholar from the Czech Republic. Our ideas are internationally sought after and travel with our Founder Dr. Harlene Anderson, who has travelled to more than 10 countries over the last year. These programs also help us to learn from our international counter parts.

We are honored to continue our training partnership with local universities: University of Houston - Clear Lake and Our Lady of the Lake University. We also expanded our relationships with Program of Counseling Psychology at University of Houston and Pacifica Graduate Institute for doctoral practicum. In 2009 we are forging new training contracts with Sam Houston State University and University of Houston - Victoria.

In the area of research we have been busy aligning our measurement tools with our conceptual frameworks and launching the International journal of Collaborative Practices which will be coming out in a few weeks. based on our response to Hurricane Katrina in 2008 we were invited by an international research institute, to do a research paper on Psychosocial Approaches to Trauma, Development and Peace building thereby providing thought leadership in the areas of Trauma and Resiliency. In 2009 we will continue our research efforts led by Cathy King and Nancy Baxley on the Rolling Conversations Project both from a clinical and operations perspective.

In the area of consultation, we continue to consult to our community on mental health frameworks and practices, one such effort was in relation to Hurricane Ike. We currently serve as a steering committee member on the Greater Houston Long Term Recovery Committee

We look forward to continuing our relationships and developing new ones with you all in the area of training, research and consultation as we grow our edges.

Now I would like to introduce Greg Fenberg, who came to HGI as an intern from UHCL and continues to amaze us with his multiple talents not limited to his therapist skills.

### **Greg Fenberg - Therapist**

#### **Learning from the Edge**

I'd like to start out by offering a quick antidote from my own personal experience. It had been about five months since I began my internship at the

Houston Galveston Institute when one day, before I had arrived at HGI, I had had to endure a rather traumatic experience at home. By the time I got to HGI, I had become a nervous wreck. I had become quite emotional and my tears were falling freely. Having already been more than a half hour late for my regular supervision session – a fact that only furthered my anxieties of that morning – I went straight into my supervisor’s office, sat down in silence, and began to cry once again.

As I began to relay my story, my feelings began to snowball and I began to question my own efficacy as a therapist. After all, “How could I possibly help others deal with their lives when it was so apparent that I couldn’t even handle my own?” My supervisor sat there and listened carefully and quietly as I processed all of my sadness and fear. After about twenty minutes had past (along with a half a box of tissues), she looked at me squarely in the eyes and said, “It sounds like you are growing your edges.” In confusion and with a puzzled look, I replied, “But what do you mean.”

Indeed, in that moment, I was learning. I had embodied at a most basic level the practice of being a learner. And what I really took from that experience was that my supervisor saw me foremost as a “human being.” The fact that I was an intern, a learner, a therapist, or what ever else all played second to the profoundness of being “human.” I was respected, validated, honored, and valued. It is these attributes that I believe underpin our way of being ... not just with our clients, but in all of our relationships, especially among ourselves. We learned to honor each other and ourselves for our own humanness. At HGI, we all speak of what it is like to be “with” our clients, to join in where ever they may find themselves. We partner ourselves with the experiences that they bring to find new understandings and create new possibilities. And as a learner, I too lived (and am still living) the experience of this partnership. With all that said, I’d like you to meet that person that shifted my life that day, my supervisor, Dr. Carolyn Callahan.

**Carolyn Callahan - Faculty**

**The Training Edge**

Thank you, Greg. I came to Houston Galveston Institute in 1997 as a “foster child” from Hope Center. And stayed.

I knew of HGI’s reputation for being on the cutting edge of theory and practice in Family Therapy, not only in Texas, but around the world, while I was still in graduate school...and had wanted to be here...I was thrilled when Harlene Anderson invited those of us from Hope Center’s recently closed family therapy department under Dr. Harriet Roberts, my mentor and friend, to come to the Institute.

Sue Levin asked me to coordinate the Institute’s contract with Child Protective Services (CPS) after Harriet finished her term. I continued to do so for 8 years, and then passed the responsibility on to Cathy King.

I was thrilled to become a member of this gifted and dedicated HGI faculty, it was a dream come true and it has been a joy to work with them over the years, helping to train and supervise student interns, including Cathy and Greg , coming out of the Our Lady of the Lake and Clear Lake Psychology Programs, among others, and indeed, from around the world, training them to work with clients who were having difficulty finding therapists prepared to work with their challenging situations, and learning and growing my own edges, along with the students, as we have continued to carry out HGI’s mission to serve challenging clients who sometimes resist the changes they actually want and need .

Somewhere along the line, Harlene informed those of us who were part of the Hope Center “Diaspora,” and had stayed with HGI, that we had been “adopted!”

I feel very privileged to continue to be part of the HGI family as it continues to grow, in these difficult times, and change to meet new challenges at the edges.

**Katarina Sowerby - Business Manager**

**Nonprofit Financial Management: Counting from the Edge**

I guess I like numbers. Once upon a time I tried to memorize the first thousand digits of Pi, you know  $22/7 = 3.14159265$  and so on but then I found an interesting job with HGI. Yes, my job is very interesting, crunching numbers and workings with therapists are very stimulating. Unfortunately I don't see clients, so I don't have a captivating and engaging story but I will try.)

Today we have heard the many great stories about HGI work and here I am, standing here trying to tell a story that often falls of the edge. Numbers.

Financial Management is often seen as a very dry subject, boring, or even an outlier because it's about numbers and money, two subjects that most people are reluctant to talk about, including in the nonprofit world.

No matter we hate talking about money and numbers, there is an inconvenient truth: for nonprofit organizations: "no money means no mission" unless we live in a utopia world where everything is free, people work on 100% voluntary basis, all services are provided on pro bono basis. Unfortunately we live in a real world, nonprofit organizations pay rents, disburse payroll expenses. All said, financial management for nonprofit involves meticulous number crunching, with all those charts and spreadsheets trying to calculate the very same numbers over and over again using various assumptions and scenarios, with a hope that it will help the cash flow, or even will increase our capability to pay our bills.

The truth is, I believe that financial management for nonprofit is probably more rigid than that of for-profit companies. Why?

- First, we all know that nonprofit organizations operate in a resource constraint environment, conversely, the scale of tasks facing these organizations continues to escalate. Effective resource allocation becomes a mantra in our daily operation, every penny counts, each dollar is stretched to its optimum value.
- Second, financial oversight and accountability are very instrumental for a nonprofit organization like HGI. Not only is it important to comply with the requirements of funding agencies and grantors, but more importantly it is an

integral part of our ethical measures because we have to make sure good stewardship of tax dollar money and donations from our supporters who believe in our work

At HGI, we are very lucky to have an accountant in our Board as our treasurer who provides us with guidance, check and balance to achieve our financial management goals.

At the Institute, we use numbers as an important decision making tool. We analyze numbers and translate them into budget; we carefully calculate the costs, especially in this less than perfect economic situation, and make necessary changes in our operations based on our financial analysis. Moreover, at HGI, our numbers are the mirror image of what we do, the reflections of our mission.

From the simple pie charts in our annual report that you will receive shortly, our numbers show that the biggest slice of our spending pie is for clinical program-related activities (46%), followed by operations that support all of the institute programs (31%), training makes 12% of the pie and the rest is for Research and Fund Development

That's from the spending perspective. From the edge of our revenue sources, 41% of our income is from restricted fund for our various clinical programs and 31% from our direct clinical services, 11% from training and 12% from unrestricted fund as well as 5% from other income.

Last but not least, as a nonprofit organization we are challenged by the dire impacts of the economic crisis. First, we are challenged by reduced available funding sources because cutting costs becomes everybody's main agenda. On the other hand, we experience increasing demand in our services due to the increased stress in the community.

We embrace those challenges with courage and stronger teamwork spirit; we are committed to facing the challenges and continue our services to the people we serve.

## **Helen Wheir- Development Consultant**

### **Thanks**

I have the honor this morning to thank those who have contributed keeping us on the edge in 2008.

The staff could not accomplish its goals and strategies without the confidence and support of the Board of Directors. Thank you for all you do for HGI.

To our faculty members, the success of our training programs would not be possible without your dedication. Thank you so much.

A huge thank you goes to our Executive Director, our Associate Director, program manager and our business manager. Sue, Saliha, Cathy and Katarina, you are the best. Our dedicated therapists deserve our thanks – as do our interns, learners and volunteers.

I saved the biggest thank you until last and that is to our donors and community partners. Very special thanks to St. Luke's Episcopal Health Charities, the Simmons Foundation, the Rockwell Fund, the United Way and the Houston Area Urban League as well as Compass Bank and Tara Energy. To our individual donors and scholarship donors, thank you.

HGI has been blessed with community partners such as ECHOS, Bethel's Place, McNamara Elementary School and Communities in Schools, Cornerstone Village Apartments, City of Houston, Systems of Hope, Domestic Relations Office and the Children's Defense Fund. Thank you all.

If I have missed anyone, I sincerely apologize. Thanks to all of you who are here today!

**Sue Levin- Executive Director**

### **Conclusion**

As we conclude our stories about 2008, I want to mention a few that have created new edges for us in 2009. After more than 25 years of providing services

for Children's Protective Services, HGI (along with other big groups in Houston) decided that the contract requirements were so unworkable and underfunded that we had to stop. This means that a large number of clients who were not successful in other agencies do not have HGI as, what was often used as, a last resort. Our success with people who are labeled difficult, chronic treatment failures, etc., comes from our work with Child Protective Services (CPS). We learned so much from them, and gave them new possibilities. It is sad to see this go.

New cutting edges for us, also in 2008, included shifting our record-keeping to a web-based, electronic data management system. This helps us be greener and leaner, as well as more mobile, our therapists working in the community can do their notes immediately, and those of us who like to work in the middle of the night or on road trips, can access our files at any time from anywhere. Don't worry, they are still confidential and meet HIPPA requirements! As you've heard, we are shifting our work and our thinking to create more opportunities for clients to receive services- we are getting outside our offices and into more community partnerships creating benefits all around. Organizations that don't have the capacity (for various reasons) to bring on therapy services can partner with us to provide those services at their site, saving us some overhead costs and adding to our ability to accomplish our mission. And clients who might not follow through on a referral, due to fear, lack of transportation, lack of energy, etc., have more opportunity to receive services as they are clustered with the other resources they are accessing in community settings. These new settings in 2009 include two assistance ministries, one in Humble and one in League City, as well as a project in development with the Prison Entrepreneurship Program which serves men who were formerly incarcerated. We continue providing therapy services to people struggling with disaster, trauma, displacement, including immigrants and refugees. We are participating in consulting and planning related to several mental health initiatives in the community. Of note, HGI has been selected as a member of the Steering Committee for Hurricane Ike's Long-term Recovery Committee.

We are building our steadiness at walking on edges, and strengthening our vision about what is beyond the current edges for HGI. We have been learning what

it takes to stay in this place; how to take care of ourselves and each other to feel safe enough to continue to grow our edges.

We are thrilled to have you, and we must have you, to support our work. You pull us back from the edge (as needed), question whether we need to be so close to the edge, encourage us to look over the edge, and even go with us on these edgy journeys! Our board, staff, learners and faculty have these experiences regularly! Our clients need us to be on the edge, with them and for them, and on their behalf, thank you.