

La Hacienda Treatment Center Leads National Advocacy Conference in Support of Addiction Treatment

April 23, 2021

Hunt, Texas - April 23, 2021 - PRESSADVANTAGE -

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Washington, DC (April 23, 2021) - Sherri Layton, La Hacienda Treatment Center's Director of Outpatient Service and Public Policy, helped plan and lead an annual advocacy event for addiction treatment professionals during April.

As she has done for many years now, Layton, through her role as Public Policy Committee Co-Chair for NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, helped produce the body's 2021 Advocacy in Action Conference & Virtual Hill Day.

"We all know COVID has hit those with substance use disorder and mental health challenges especially hard. I was so encouraged for our elected officials to really be paying attention to this. I had several conversations, they initiated, wanting to better understand how people have been affected," said Layton.

Two Days of Educational Sessions

The conference began with briefings on current legislation and essential advocacy issues. These included sessions on:

- A report on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) within the Department of Health and Human Services

- Training, educating, and equipping the workforce that is tackling the addiction crisis

-Medicaid initiatives to address opioid and other substance use disorders

-Federal funding for substance use disorder prevention, treatment, and recovery

-Challenges facing the nation due to the evolving polysubstance use epidemic

-How to make current legislation locally relevant and exploring ways to build relationships for long-term advocacy.

Virtual Visits to Capitol Hill

Armed with this information, on Hill Day, participants met virtually with lawmakers and their staff on Capitol Hill about the issues that affect the addiction profession, and those they serve.

For La Hacienda Treatment Center's primary service area, visits included the offices of Sen. Ted Cruz and John Cornyn, Rep. Chip Roy and Rep. Dr. Michael Burgess. Constituents arranged the appointments in advance.

During a next-day virtual meeting with NAADAC Executive Director Cynthia Moreno Touhy and President Mita M. Johnson, participants reviewed their experiences from Hill Day and planned their next steps.

Key Issues

Key issues before lawmakers to which advocates sought attention this year included:

Investing in the Addiction Workforce and Infrastructure. Data shows that the pandemic is increasing substance use and overdose deaths. The country must continue its commitment to building and maintaining a strong addiction workforce and infrastructure.

Strengthening Behavioral Health Parity Laws. While current parity laws require insurers to treat substance use disorder and mental health care the same way they treat medical or physical care, the lack of enforcement has led to significant gaps in coverage for millions of Americans.

Addressing Addiction Professional Credentialing. Licensure and credentialing requirements vary greatly from state to state and serve as a barrier to entry, advancement, and retention for many addiction professionals.

They also encouraged lawmakers to stay engaged on these important issues by joining the newly formed

Bipartisan Addiction and Mental Health Taskforce or the Congressional Addiction, Treatment and Recovery Caucus.

Two-Way Exchange

Layton says legislators and their staffs take advantage of the exchanges to gather information helpful in formulating the nation's policies regarding addiction treatment and related matters.

They ask for statistics and anecdotal information which the addiction treatment professionals have ready access.

For example, a policy advisor to a Congressman from Texas requested information related to instances where insurance companies or government officials got in the way instead of abetting the process.

Layton also extends invitations for lawmakers and their assistants to visit La Hacienda Treatment Center's Hunt campus.

More Participants Despite Pandemic

For the second year in a row due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Layton participated in this year's event from home and her office at La Hacienda Treatment Center.

"The virtual visits allow us to continue this important work on behalf of the profession and the people we serve, but we miss being together in DC. In person, we are able to support new advocates and help them feel comfortable," she said.

With advances in the fight against Covid-19, NAADAC officials hope next year's Advocacy in Action Conference will be in person in the nation's capital again.

A total of 259 advocates participated this year, including 16 from Texas. One upside to the virtual events has been increased participation. More addiction treatment professionals are able to join in the sessions than when they were in-person.

Credits Mentors for Passion for Advocacy

Sherri Layton has worked in addiction treatment since the summer after her freshman year of college. She served on the staffs of non-profit programs and inpatient treatment centers and had her own counseling practice before coming to La Hacienda Treatment Center in 1992.

She became involved in advocacy work about 15 years ago. In 2014 she received NAADAC's Sen. Harold E. Hughes Advocate of the Year Award.

"I didn't have formal training for advocacy," she says. "I attribute the passion and much of what I have learned from wonderful mentors that I have had."

La Hacienda Addiction Treatment Center

La Hacienda Addiction Treatment Center is a leading drug and alcohol addiction treatment center located on a gorgeous 40-acre lot in Hunt, TX. The facility is a "healing" space for every client that walks through their door.

At La Hacienda Treatment Center, it is not just about getting clean or sober from drugs and alcohol, it is so much more than that. They believe that much of treatment is about the spiritual experience, and they use many medical and therapeutic modalities necessary for the person to recover from emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physical problems. The patients at La Hacienda Treatment Center will always be the number one priority, with the focus being on individualized, personal, care.

Contact La Hacienda Treatment Center:

Elizabeth Olson

La Hacienda Treatment Center
145 La Hacienda Way Southwest
Hunt, Texas 78024

P: (830) 238-4222 x521

eolson@lahacienda.com

<https://www.lahacienda.com>

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For more information about La Hacienda Treatment Center, contact the company here: La Hacienda Treatment Center Elizabeth Olson P: (830) 238-4222 x521 eolson@lahacienda.com La Hacienda Treatment Center 145 La Hacienda Way Southwest Hunt, Texas 78024

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La Hacienda Treatment Center

La Hacienda is a leading drug and alcohol addiction treatment center. Recovery is an ongoing process, and addiction is a treatable disease of the mind, body and spirit. Our medical & residential facility spans a gorgeous 40-acre property in Hunt, Texas.

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Email: eolson@lahacienda.com

Phone: P: (830) 238-4222 x521



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