



east bay community action program
THE BRIDGE TO SELF-RELIANCE

January 2019

Employee Spotlight: Caroleann Walker, LICSW, Empowers Staff and Patients

Caroleann Walker, LICSW, is a very busy woman. When she isn't working at her full-time job as Supervisor of Behavioral Health at East Bay Family Health Care in Newport, a division of East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP), or part-time in her private practice, she's most likely working on her Ph.D. in Social Work.

Even within the bounds of her work at EBCAP Walker wears several hats. Besides serving as a supervisor, she provides outpatient therapy for patients ranging from three to 60 years of age, she oversees the SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment) program, she provides direct care for patients who have been referred through SBIRT consultation, and she mentors and supervises an intern, Michelle Silvia, from Rhode Island College.

“Caroleann does a great job training, and then trusts in her staff’s ability to do the work. She provides support when needed, and she’s very approachable.”

-Michelle Silvia, Behavioral Health Intern, Rhode Island College, MSW May 2019

Silvia, who is set to graduate with a master's degree in Social Work in May, has been an intern under Walker's direction since last July. Silvia credits Walker as a supervisor who empowers her staff to learn and grow. “Caroleann does a great job training, and then trusts in her staff’s ability to do the work. She provides support when needed, and she’s very approachable,” said Silvia. She draws a parallel with how Walker works with patients, “she counsels them, gives them the tools they need, and she trusts them to carry out their plans for success – while offering her support should they need it.”

As a Federally Qualified Community Health Center, EBCAP offers an integrated model of healthcare which includes medical, behavioral health and dental care. Walker is currently working on her Ph.D. in Social Work, and research for her dissertation has revealed that many scholars and experts in her field confirm what she has witnessed first-hand – that integrated healthcare is efficient and successful.

Walker stated that she regularly meets new patients through what the health center staff members call a “warm hand-off,” meaning that instead of having an administrative staff person make a Behavioral Health appointment for a later date, the patient is introduced to Walker, or another member of her staff, by the patient's primary care provider during the patient's medical appointment. The patient sees the Behavioral Health specialist as a member of their care team. Walker shared that research and the

literature show that 70% of patients come to their primary care provider with a behavioral health concern, so having access to the Behavioral Health staff in the same location as their medical provider is important.

Walker began working at EBCAP five years ago as a supervisor for the Healthy Families America program in EBCAP's Family Development Department. There she learned about the many and varied health and human services provided by EBCAP, as well as resources available outside of the agency. It's for this reason that she requires all new hires and interns in her department to complete an "EBCAP Family Center Rotation." During this training rotation, the new hires conduct informational interviews with staff from each Family Center program. She feels this is key to her staff understanding the agency's services and to their ability to provide the best patient-centered care possible.

She shared an experience where she was called in to talk with a woman about depression. After speaking with the patient, Walker realized the source of the woman's distress wasn't depression, rather it was concern over the heat in her home having been shut off and she had a newborn baby. Walker's knowledge of EBCAP's human services programs was an asset in this situation. She was able to help the patient speak with one of EBCAP's heating assistance program staff members, and heat was restored to the patient's home. In addition, the patient was able to get connected with the WIC program to help with the newborn baby's nutrition.

Last month Walker referred 7 patients to EBCAP's Adopt A Family holiday giving program. All 7 of their families were adopted, receiving gifts for the holidays from anonymous donors. She said "I found it particularly heartwarming to receive feedback from the parents on what a difference it made for them and their children. Kim Wetherald and her staff at EBCAP's Office of Volunteer Services work hard to coordinate that program. They are very accommodating and kind, and the families are so grateful."

When asked why she chooses to work at EBCAP Walker expressed appreciation for the multitude of health and human services offered by EBCAP. She said, "We have all the services available to make the patient successful." As a supervisor and clinician, she is certainly utilizing those resources to the best of her ability.

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