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Lisa Vara, VP PACT Services

Bridgeway VP Wins the Mort Gati Award

Union, NJ (December 2, 2024) – Bridgeway Behavioral Health Services is proud to announce that Lisa Vara, Vice President of PACT Services, will be honored by the New Jersey Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association (NJPRA) with this year’s Mort Gati Award, their most prestigious award. The Mort Gati Award honors a NJ mental health practitioner who embodies the philosophy of psychiatric rehabilitation, demonstrates a positive impact upon mental health needs and services, and advocates for equal opportunities, human rights and improved quality of life for

persons in recovery. The award ceremony will take place on December 11, 2024, at the NJPRA 44th Fall Conference, which be held at the FEA Conference Center in Monroe Township. www.njpra.org

As Vice President of PACT Services at Bridgeway Behavioral Health Services, Ms. Vara has oversight over Bridgeway’s 13 teams, the state’s largest single PACT provider. PACT stands for Program of Assertive Community Treatment, a program that offers comprehensive community-based integrated rehabilitation, treatment and wrap-around support services to individuals with serious mental illness, who have experienced hospitalizations.

“I am deeply honored to be joining an illustrious group of Mort Gati winners like Cory Storch, Ken Gill, Steve Fishbein, Buddy Garfinkle, Peggy Swarbrick, Dave D’Antonio, Diane Piagesi-Zett and Melissa Roberts” said Ms. Vara. “It has been a privilege to work in the field of psychiatric rehabilitation for over 25 years. Thank you to NJPRA for this recognition.”

Lisa Vara has worked at Bridgeway for 25 years. She began her career as an Employment Specialist in Bridgeway’s Career Services department where she demonstrated motivation, knowledge of psychiatric rehabilitation practices and principles, and a strong ethical foundation. When she was promoted to Team Leader in PACT, she infused her team with the importance of work and school in one’s recovery and the team’s outcomes in these areas improved markedly. Her team helped people served in multiple areas including housing and overall skill development. When Bridgeway partnered with Rutgers School of Health Related Professions to launch an agency-wide Career Development Initiative, Lisa was at the forefront as project leader and trainer to ensure that all programs gained a Career Services focus.

On the state level, Ms. Vara advocates for program quality, including the building of evidenced-based practices layered upon the PACT platform. These practices include Illness Management and Recovery (IMR), and Integrated Dual Disorder Treatment (IDDT). Her humility has helped her gain trust internally and with the New Jersey Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), and she serves as the leading voice for the Statewide PACT network.

“In my years in the mental health field in New Jersey, I have met only a handful of people who deserve this award as much as our own Lisa Vara, VP of PACT Services” said Buddy Garfinkle, EVP and Chief Program Officer.

About Bridgeway

Over the past 55 years, Bridgeway Behavioral Health Services has grown from providing one vocational program for people experiencing mental health disabilities, located in Bridgeway's founding home in the City of Elizabeth, to providing a range of urgent care, short-term and long-term services. Bridgeway is committed to parity in behavioral health care across the disability spectrum. Bridgeway services provide evidence-based treatment for mental health care, substance use, and co-morbidities in ten New Jersey counties. Services include living room model crisis intervention centers in Hudson and Union Counties, as well as extensive professional session-based counseling services. Recently, Bridgeway was chosen to provide 988 crisis response services in five NJ counties. For more information, visit www.bridgewaybhs.org

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