Project Sendero al Bienestar
Recovery Alliance, El Paso, Texas

The goal of Project Sendero al Bienestar is to provide a long term path to recovery for homeless and indigent people with co-occurring addiction and mental health disorders in El Paso County, Texas. Through this targeted capacity expansion grant from SAMSHA, Recovery Alliance, a peer-run recovery support organization, provides increased outreach to persons at risk, such as individuals in homeless shelters, hobo camps, indigent medical clinics, and MHMR clinics. Research has indicted that homeless and indigent populations have high rates of substance use disorders, often have co-occurring mental health disorders, and generally lack the financial resources to obtain needed services in either domain.

Recovery Alliance is working with community partners to build a recovery oriented systems of care model in El Paso. In collaboration with Homeward Bound, a local addiction treatment provider, Project Sendero is creating the opportunity for an additional 300+ qualified persons with co-occurring disorders to receive 7-day detox treatment. Through the strong relationships between Recovery Alliance and Homeward Bound staff, detox patients are oriented to Project Sendero opportunities following release from detox services. Qualified persons are invited to take the next step and enter Casa Vida, a residential program with peer-operated recovery support services, for an average stay of 6 weeks. During their stay at Casa Vida, residents receive recovery coaching; initiate individual recovery plans; participate in classes; build recovery, physical, and social capital; are introduced to the culture of recovery; and find a new place in their community as a person in recovery. Each participant is matched with a Recovery Ally and will have their support for up to two years. Through monthly recovery checkups by the Recovery Ally following their departure from Casa Vida, participants’ paths to recovery remain on course which enables more recovering individuals to return to full, productive membership in the larger El Paso community.

Recovery Allies strive to build a stronger recovery oriented systems of care for the participants through working with community partners and strengthening connections with diverse agencies. The Recovery Allies guide mentees into their new lives and assist them in building personal and social strengths in an effort to sustain the recovery process. The Recovery Allies receive training in motivational interviewing, an evidence-based practice, which is provided in an individualized, culturally appropriate manner with the goal of improved recovery outcomes.

Considering the significant costs for El Paso County in dealing with the physical, social, and economic effects of mental health and addiction disorders, the evaluation of Project Sendero outcomes is an important part of Recovery Alliance’s plan. Laurel Mangrum, Ph.D., is the lead evaluator for this project and Michele Murphy-Smith, Ph.D. is the process evaluator. Recovery Alliance receives process evaluation data on a quarterly basis, which they can use to refine and improve the processes and systems of care. An outcome evaluation will be conducted toward the close of the project to assess participant outcomes in the areas of substance use, mental health symptoms, and social functioning. The Sendero Project director is Ben Bass, who is the Executive Director of Recovery Alliance.