

# Recognizing *Sparks of Brilliance*

Living Well Transitions uses mindfulness-based processes to support client growth

Living Well Transitions is a Boulder-based assertive community treatment program for young adults founded by Naropa alumnus Bill Sell. Ten of its sixteen employees are Naropa graduates, and thirteen Naropa graduate psychology students have been welcomed to intern during their final school year or spend a one-semester practicum at Living Well in their second year of studies.

Living Well specializes in working with young adults who need support in changing destructive behavioral patterns and leading more balanced lives. Clients reside in rental apartments, attend school, hold jobs and volunteer while they work toward developing a healthy lifestyle.

“We’re helping clients be more self-aware, communicate with more integrity and congruence and really develop a sense of self that is more accommodating of their neuroses, more gentle and compassionate,” says Clinical Intake Director Brooks Witter (MA ’05). Witter is a member of Naropa’s board of trustees, and he’s been a clinical tutor and a teaching assistant in contemplative psychology graduate courses.

A team includes a program manager who helps set goals, two life skills counselors who help with everyday tasks, and a therapist who provides both individual and group psychotherapy.

“My training at Naropa gave me skills in establishing relationships and a trust and understanding that a therapeutic relationship can bring about change. Trusting in the power of compassion and connection has been huge in terms of this work,” says Jill Roth (MA ’08), a program manager.

Relationships can both help and hinder psychological growth. When Bill Sell (MA ’88) founded the company in 2004, his studies of group dynamics revealed that clients in residential treatment were trying too hard to fit in, but when placed in their own apartments they developed personal awareness and self-respect. Sell was diagnosed with bone cancer in 2006, and he passed away in 2008.

“Bill was just an incredible man, a great mentor and leader. He was a very skilled clinician in working with kids and families,” Witter says.

Britton Turkett (MA ’04) is program director at Living Well, and he’s been a teaching assistant in Naropa’s Religious Studies and Transpersonal Counseling Psychology departments. Turkett and Witter gave a prospective client a tour the day after Sell



died, solidifying their commitment to keep Sell’s dream alive. Julie Randall was named executive director and the core staff took on more responsibilities as the company adjusted to the loss of their leader.

Both Living Well Transitions and Naropa University have similar philosophies about basic goodness and brilliant sanity. Turkett explains the Living Well view that all beings possess an awakened heart or mind. He says clinicians’ familiarity with their own minds is as important as their training in psychological theory and intervention because they are well suited to help clients work through their thought and behavioral patterns.

“The client who can catch a glimpse of his or her wisdom...has the opportunity, maybe for the first time, to see that they are at times healthy. There is not only, then, the instillation of hope, but also the confidence in the process of uncovering the layers that have covered this ‘brilliant sanity’ for so long,” Turkett says.

Rachel (Skolnik) Bonaiuto (MA ’04), a life skills counselor, says the Living Well environment has a lot of Naropa touches. “We bow in before our staff meetings, and we meditate together every Friday. Even people who didn’t graduate from Naropa have committed to learning the basic principles of mindfulness,” Bonaiuto says.

In January, Turkett was a panelist and Witter a moderator in a panel discussion entitled “Perspectives on the Use of Mindfulness-Based Processes to Support Client Growth and Staff Wellness” at the National Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs (NATSAP) conference in La Jolla, Calif.—*Brenda Gillen*