The year was 1924, and the City of Los Angeles just topped 1 million in population. Mulholland Highway and MGM Studios opened for business. And on a February afternoon, attendees at a festive reception just south of downtown celebrated the launch of a new clinic that would bring children’s mental health services in L.A. into the modern era.

"Of far-reaching import to parents and children of Los Angeles, announcement was made yesterday of the establishment of a child guidance clinic in the city," reported the Feb. 6 Los Angeles Times. The Child Guidance Clinic of Los Angeles, as it was then known, opened as one of eight such programs across the U.S. developed by the National Committee for Mental Hygiene with funding from the Commonwealth Fund.

In an era where terms like “insane asylum” and “lunacy laws” typified the response to mental illness, the Committee sought to “humanize the public attitude.” Their child-guidance approach emphasized “consideration of the individual child as a living, functioning, physical and mental whole.”

This philosophy was detailed a few years later by the Clinic’s first director, Ralph P. Truitt, M.D, in the American Journal of Public Health. “The idea was to detect and treat children’s difficulties at a stage when actual care in the community was still possible,” he wrote, “and community resources could be used effectively in a preventive way.”

Nine decades later, the Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic (the name changed in the 1960s) remains dedicated to prevention and early intervention as central to community mental health and well-being—a remarkable living legacy of that early vision. “Not a lot of things in Los Angeles last 90 years. This anniversary is cause for celebration,” says David L. Hirsch, Esq., Member of the Clinic’s Board of Directors and Chair of the Board’s Anniversary Committee.

Throughout 2014, the Clinic is marking the anniversary with a celebratory gathering for staff and family, a gala event in the fall to thank donors and friends, as well as commemorations with elected officials. An educational video spotlighting the Clinic’s special focus on the impact of trauma on children will soon be released.

90th ANNIVERSARY
Nine Decades Innovating Mental Health Services for Children

Established in 1924, the Clinic broke ground on a new West Adams Blvd. site in 1962.
Dear Friends:

It's a celebration! Los Angeles is heralded as a place of newness – an ever-changing landscape. However, sometimes, we need to celebrate our stellar history. So, I'm pleased to invite you to celebrate with us all year long as we mark the 90th Anniversary of the Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic!

Celebrate 90 years of innovation. Not many organizations have thrived over nine decades in this city—but the Clinic has grown stronger, more relevant, and more necessary than ever. We remain steadfast to the commitment on which we were founded in 1924: to care for the mental health of children and the well-being of families. Yet we continue to push the field forward with advances in evidence-based care, multidisciplinary teamwork, pioneering trauma-informed care, partnerships with primary care providers and other innovative affiliations.

Celebrate the gift of old friends and new. As we mark this milestone, we are grateful for long-time, true friends of the Clinic, such as Dr. Robert Barron, who worked here for 32 years and now has given our programs a substantial legacy gift, as well as influential former Advisory Board member Victoria Ertezsek Foote, who sadly left us last year. We are memorializing both of these generous philanthropists at the Clinic with special plaques in their honor. We also delight in new friendships, such as the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles with its support for our innovative Early Intervention Training Institute. And we enjoy renewed partnerships, as with the California Community Foundation’s support of our Access Center’s new wellness program to serve children and youth who have experienced trauma.

Join the festivities! Our 90th Anniversary wouldn’t be a celebration without you. Please follow us on Facebook and Twitter, where we’ll keep you informed of historical highlights and special events. And consider a gift in support of the thousands of children we serve annually. Our mission could not be more critical to the well-being of our children and our society as a whole. We thank you for your support!

Shelly Holmes
Chairperson of the Board

Special Thanks: Jewish Community Foundation

We are grateful for the generosity of a new friend. The Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles recently awarded the Clinic a $20,000 grant for our Early Intervention Training Institute (EITI).

The grant will help us train at least 700 “gatekeepers”—from Early Head Start educators to child care providers—who work daily with infants and toddlers. These professionals often are in the best position to identify children at risk for abuse, neglect, or developmental delays and to intervene early.

Research has repeatedly demonstrated that healthy early brain development and supportive relationships are essential to lifelong success and, conversely, that untreated childhood trauma and neglect can be devastating to overall development.

“EITI gives each trainee critically important tools to positively impact the academic and social-emotional-developmental trajectories of young children,” said Jacqulyn Christensen, Ph.D., EITI Coordinator. “The new grant from the Jewish Community Foundation will benefit many, many more children at risk.”

For more on EITI, visit www.lachild.org.
In Memoriam: Dr. Robert F. Barron
Child psychiatrist’s support lives on

In 1965, a young child psychologist joined the staff of the Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic. Robert F. Barron, Ph.D., would go on to serve the Clinic in various capacities for the next 32 years, including as Director of Outpatient Services.

Now Dr. Barron, who passed away July 27, 2013, has ensured that future generations of children will benefit from his commitment with a very generous gift of more than $340,000 to the Clinic from his trust estate. "Bob really enjoyed working with children. He was dedicated to his job and felt he was accomplishing something important,” says his friend, Jana Messih.

David L. Hirsch, Esq., Advancement Committee Chairperson for the Clinic Board of Directors, knew Dr. Barron during his tenure on staff and appreciated him as a tireless colleague – especially as the Board raised funds to build new Clinic quarters. “He was always extremely helpful to our efforts,” says Mr. Hirsch, who, expressed the Clinic’s gratitude. “Private funds such as Dr. Barron’s gift enable us to do important and innovative things we otherwise can’t do for local children in great need, including piloting new programs and proving their effectiveness.”

“Dr. Barron was an excellent therapist and an excellent administrator as well,” recalls Evis Coda, MD, former Clinic Medical Director, and Dr. Barron’s colleague and close friend for many decades.

Dr. Coda and Dr. Barron first met at USC, where Dr. Barron was studying for his doctorate. Soon, they worked together at the Child Guidance Clinic. Dr. Barron became a regular visitor to the Coda home for holidays and major occasions. “He was a good friend to our entire family,” says Dr. Coda.

Dr. Barron was born in San Francisco in 1929. After his retirement in 1997, his wanderlust took him to Timbuktu, China, India, the British Isles and other places. Wherever he went, he left a positive impression. “People who met him invariably described him as ‘such a gentleman,’” notes Ms. Messih, “and ‘always gracious.’”

Dr. Barron left his entire estate to charity—the largest recipient the place he may have loved the most: the Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic. “Bob’s legacy will live on in the children and families yet to come through our doors,” says Elizabeth W. Pfromm, M.S., MPA, Clinic President/CEO. “His generous gift will underwrite the kinds of new services which he would have championed.”

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“Our 90th anniversary is a wonderful opportunity to not only reflect on the remarkable success of the Clinic’s founders, but to continue their work,” says Elizabeth W. Pfromm, M.S., MPA, Clinic President/CEO. “Today we do so by bringing greater awareness to the importance of expert, evidence-based mental health services in creating healthier children and families, and stronger communities.”

The Clinic doors first opened at 1401 Grand Avenue. By 1925, it welcomed a new sponsor: the Southern California Society for Mental Hygiene, with funding from the Community Welfare Foundation, later the United Way.

In the 1940s, the Clinic pioneered a multi-disciplinary team approach to treatment to best understand children’s needs and develop individualized treatment plans for improved emotional and behavioral outcomes.

In 1965, the Clinic launched a partnership with USC, training new generations of child psychiatrists and psychologists. Quinton C. James, M.D., was in that first USC program. He later worked for the Clinic as a child psychiatrist, then joined its Board in 1990.

Jada Rodriguez, left, shares the Clinic’s appreciation of our staff at the 90th Anniversary BBQ celebration with a photobooth kiss for her mom, Tiffany Rodriguez, Vice President of Programs.
The community around the Clinic evolved over the decades, says Dr. James, attracting a diverse population that included African-Americans and Latinos. “The demographics changed, but the Clinic stayed and served the people who needed its programs.”

In the 1980s, the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health began contracting with the Clinic to provide expert, state-mandated services to children—a partnership that has benefited many thousands of children and youth.

In 1994, after receiving a transformational gift from benefactors Harriet and Charles Luckman, the Clinic opened its own building at 3787 S. Vermont Avenue, now home to its busy walk-in Access Center. Seven years later, a second Clinic building opened up the street at 3031 S. Vermont Avenue.

Today, the Clinic remains in the forefront of innovation. In recent years it has emerged as the recognized leader locally in trauma-informed care. Notes President/CEO Pfromm, “We are passionate about addressing the impact of child traumatic stress with research-validated practices that support lifelong health, social and emotional well-being, and success.”

“Our 90th Anniversary will enable the Clinic to build awareness; to thank our donors, friends, elected officials and staff; and, as an organization, look forward to the next 90 years.”

— David L. Hirsch, Esq.
Chair of the Board’s Anniversary Committee
California Community Foundation Support

Access Center Adds Wellness Strategy for Trauma

Each weekday, families in distress or in crisis stream into the Clinic’s walk-in Access Center at 3787 S. Vermont Avenue, hoping to find answers, resources and next steps for their children.

Those children who are diagnosed with mental disorders are seen that same day by a compassionate, expert therapist and, as appropriate, enrolled in one of the Clinic’s programs. But what of the child who may be struggling with the trauma he or she has experienced, but whose impairment falls short of the threshold for a diagnosis, and thus doesn’t qualify for publicly funded services?

That’s the child that Clinic leaders are reaching with a new pilot initiative that expands its popular port of entry to an “Access and Wellness Center.”

“We want to reach children before they develop a diagnosable mental health problem, and shore up their resiliency and protective factors,” says Tiffany T. Rodriguez, LMFT, Clinic Vice President of Programs.

The two-year pilot project—which targets youth ages 6 to 18 years—has been funded with a $102,000 grant from the California Community Foundation, coupled with a $150,000 fund from the Clinic Board of Directors.

The expanded wellness project introduces a screening tool that enables specially trained staff to assess a child’s level of exposure to violence and traumatic events. Untreated childhood trauma on multiple levels — such as parental alcoholism paired with child maltreatment — results in chronic illness and shortened lives, according to the federally funded Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. Children and teens who don’t meet current criteria for a mental health diagnosis, but clearly need help, will be offered a seven-to-ten-week series of wellness groups adapted from a nationally recognized model called “Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS).”

CBITS was developed by a team of clinician-researchers from the RAND Corporation, UCLA, and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). It is designed to reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and behavioral problems, programs, and to improve functioning school performance, peer and parent support, and coping skills.

Working closely with co-developer Marleen Wong, LCSW, Ph.D., the Clinic participated in piloting CBITS at Foshay Learning Center in South Los Angeles in 2006 as part of a RAND/UCLA research project, which established CBITS as an evidence-based practice. The CBITS intervention has since been adopted nationally and by the LAUSD and the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health.

The Clinic has adapted the CBITS model — originally intended to take place in schools — to its own setting for the two-year pilot project. The target is untreated traumatic stress, which can accumulate and trigger problems over a lifetime.

“We’re excited that this pilot program will enable us to serve those kids who normally wouldn’t get services,” says Andrew Kurtz, MA, LMFT, Access Center Director. “We’ll be helping them build resilience and identify more protective factors, such as knowing how to mobilize support for themselves in their own family and their community.”

Currently, the walk-in Access Center serves more than 1,700 clients annually. Along with introducing the pilot wellness initiative in March, the Clinic expanded the Center’s hours from 8 am-noon to 8 am-2 pm weekdays.

Over the next three years, Clinic leaders plan to expand wellness services at the convenient Center, part of the Clinic’s long-term focus on providing effective solutions in a community where undiagnosed traumatic stress continues to derail too many young lives.
Motor vehicle injuries are a leading cause of death among children in the U.S. Many of these deaths can be prevented, says the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In fact, placing children in age- and size-appropriate car seats and booster seats reduces serious and fatal injuries by more than half.

In Latino and African American communities including those served by the Clinic, researchers cite worrisome data indicating infants and toddlers may be at greater risk of harm or injury in auto accidents.

“Education about the importance of car seat usage is critically important,” says Quinn Bartholomew in the Clinic’s Early Intervention and Community Wellness Division. To that end, the Division’s Family Resource Center (FRC) provides parent education in proper car seat usage and safety. To eliminate expense as a barrier to safety, the FRC also distributes free, new, age-appropriate car seats for various age levels to families in financial need.

The demand is ongoing. The FRC is asking for donations of car seats, with a special need for toddler-age seats, to ensure all families can be helped. All donated car seats must be new and have a manufacturer’s warranty tag somewhere on the seat.

To donate, contact Quinn Bartholomew at qurich@lacgc.org or 323-373-2400, ext. 3205.