



# Increasing Access: A Young Person with a Big Future

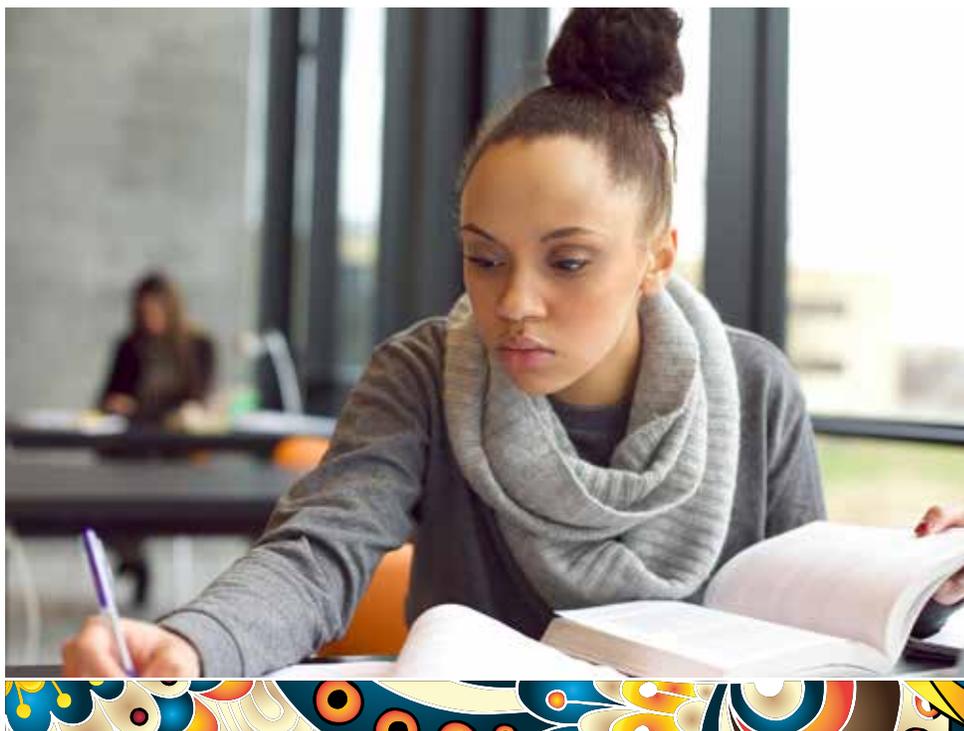
At 15, Josceline was hiding a terrible secret — something so painful, she had told no one — and she was crumbling under the pressure. From the ages of 5 to 10, she had been sexually molested by a family member, then threatened by him to keep silent. Even though the abuse had stopped, the traumatic fallout continued.

"Having a secret like that kind of drives you crazy," says Josceline, now 18. "You don't know what's normal and what isn't." Angry and confused, she started fighting in school, her grades dropped, and she began cutting herself.

Finally, the dam burst and she told a teacher — often a turning point for many children and youth who experience trauma. Child Protective Services stepped in, and Josceline's parents, who had repeatedly asked her what was wrong, now knew. Still, she was reluctant to tell them everything. Then she found a safe zone to tell her story: the L.A. Child Guidance Clinic. "Being there helped me learn how to trust people," she says.

Like many, Josceline began to heal by seeking help through the Clinic's Access Center, which saw 1,941 walk-ins in FY 2015-16. Access therapists follow a trauma-informed screening model, backed by research, including the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACEs) by the CDC and Kaiser Permanente. The study linked childhood trauma to increased risk of chronic health conditions and behavioral health disorders in adults.

"Trauma is destabilizing. Often what we witness in the initial screening or early therapy sessions is just the tip of the iceberg," says Adam Sternberg, Psy.D.,



director of Access and Wellness Services. "We are trained to go beneath that surface, ask the right questions, and look for the trauma history."

Often, the mere act of being heard gives people relief. That happened for Josceline. "At first I couldn't look my therapist in the eye," she says, "but I knew she was listening."

Gradually, Josceline found the courage to talk to her parents and to face her perpetrator in court. Her junior year, the girl who had barely spoken to anyone organized a "Denim Day" at her high school to raise awareness about sexual assault. She told classmates what had happened to her and, the next year, held an eye-opening workshop on rape culture and consent.

The process of healing from trauma is "very, very tough," she says. "But by

sharing my experience, other people can know they're not alone."

"Trauma is treatable. Everyone who walks through the door has the opportunity to recover and have a better life. No situation is so hopeless we can't help them," says Amber Rickert, LCSW, MPH, director of Outpatient Services.

Among the Clinic's best practices are questions its therapists ask at the end of each session: "Was today helpful? If yes, then how, and, if no, why not? And, how can we keep this momentum going?" These encourage a dialogue.

Today, Josceline is in her freshman year at California State University, Stanislaus, and contemplating a career in child psychology. "What my therapist did for me," she says, "by listening, by never giving up on me — I want to do that for other kids."