

Mental Health Awareness Week

A marvelous partnership and friendship!



Nancy Hart and Allison Velez

Photo and advertorial by Jude Forsyth

In honor of mental health awareness week, the HL spotlight is focusing on two Navarre professionals who are trying to break through the stigma that still remains surrounding mental health counseling- Allison Velez and Nancy Hart.

While Velez states that many healthy people come to counseling to work through a specific event or life issue, she and Hart both enjoy sharing "break-through" moments with their clients.

"Counseling isn't always about feeling troubled or sick; people often just want things to be better in their life. It is very rewarding to find creative ways to support someone to inspire themselves," said Velez.

Hart uses a car analogy that has Velez laughing,

"Healthy people understand that taking care of the mind and body is like taking care of your car. If you want them to keep working well, you get them a tune-up!"

Velez and Hart have both the education and the experience to also work with people who may need more than a tune-up.

Velez is a licensed mental health counselor has worked with families, adolescents, children, adults and couples across many settings in the past 15 years. She is also a certified addiction professional.

"I enjoy helping individuals and couples and this may sound a little crazy, but I love teenagers!" explained Velez. "It is fun working with them and their families."

Hart can diagnose, counsel, treat and when necessary, prescribe medications. That's because she is a board certified family psychiatric and mental health registered nurse practitioner. She has a background in family practice medicine and she has been

a health care professional for 14 years.

Velez and Hart practice at their Navarre office located in Duncan Plaza on State Road 87, but they did not start there together. They met more than ten years ago, but Hurricane Ivan sent them on separate paths.

Hart pursued an interest and practice in Christian counseling and worked, as she still does today, in support of community ministry at the Navarre United Methodist church. Velez moved into management and student supervision. While she enjoyed supporting young mental health clinicians, she realized she missed working directly with the clients. She made a decision to work part time and to return to client counseling. When Hart found out about her decision she convinced Velez they should work together to support the Navarre community.

"This is a wonderful community and we both are committed to helping the people here to thrive," said Hart.

In early 2011 they started counseling services in Navarre in their Duncan Plaza offices. They began to explore how to help each other by balancing their perspectives in support of their mutual clients.

"It helps sometimes to have a different counselor for a young family member. Hart and I will work separately with family members and then facilitate a session together. Doing this we each support the voice of the individual members and mediate the listening skills as well," explained Velez.

If Velez is counseling someone and believes they may benefit from Hart's ability to diagnose and prescribe medication, she will bring Hart into the circle to support the client. Other times Hart will call Velez in on a couple or

family session because Velez may have a different insight to share.

"It just makes for a better practice to have another counselor," said Hart. "Allison is such a resource for me. It has been a marvelous partnership and friendship."

Velez is sure that their partnership is really in keeping with their understanding of the foundation of mental health counseling.

"Most people have issues that blend family, work, friends, and a system for doing things. Yet often people feel like they are alone. Like our partnership, we believe you don't have to experience the challenges of life alone" said Velez.

Hart adds, "Most people don't have a plan to deal with emotional issues. We will help you figure a way to get things to be better in your life."

They encourage people to explore their health insurance plans for mental health coverage and also to see if there are employer supported programs. Their services include Tricare Prime and other insurance plans including some Medicaid plans.

"We encourage people to know what resources they have available. Many times even a few sessions can facilitate better communication with spouses and family members or work through an issue that supports a breakthrough," said Velez.

Both Velez and Hart are excited about growing their shared practice. They believe the Navarre community would benefit from the opportunity to attend specialized group sessions. They look forward to expanding and designing a new space for their practice. For more information, call Allison Velez at 850-376-2682 or call Nancy Hart at 850-803-1566.