

SVETLANA LESOVA



Svetlana has been in her current role of Assistant Director of Forensic, Diversion and Re-entry system of care since October 2022.

Svetlana came to the Bay Area from Ukraine in 1990 and began her journey in the field of mental health, earning a Bachelor's Degree in Clinical Psychology from SF State University. She subsequently earned her Master's Degree in Counseling Psychology from JFK University and received her MFT License in 2003.

Svetlana brings over 20 years of experience in public service at the Alameda County Social Services Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) where she helped build and oversee high-impact programs for system-involved, vulnerable, diverse communities. During her tenure with DCFS, Svetlana's responsibilities evolved from direct services, to leading a large team of staff and overseeing various programs and contracts focused on service delivery and system improvement.

Svetlana enjoys Tuesday dinners with her family, being a mom and an auntie, traveling with her partner and simply having Sunday morning coffee.

We honor you, Svetlana as a phenomenal woman in Behavioral Health!



Svetlana Lesova

What motivated you to pursue a career in behavioral health?

I was born and grew up in Ukraine. In 1989 my family and I were refugees from the Soviet regime. It was a long journey to get to the United States that included many life experience and lessons, while being separated from my family in the process of immigration. Coming to the United States as a teenager and not being able to speak English provided me with an opportunity to communicate and connect with others using alternative methods of communication and increased attunement to environment, human experience, body language and community. I became very connected to immigrant communities and curious about some people's ability to adapt and thrive, while supporting those who struggled with transition and change. I leaned into instilled value of education from my family and began taking classes in community college. Though, I previously studied math in Ukraine, I decided to take a psychology course to help me learn English. This was the beginning of my 25-year career in behavioral health. This psychology class provided me with answers and further awakened my curiosity about human behavior, internal and external motivation, the role of family and community and overall people's ability to thrive during life's challenges, while adapting to change.

How has the behavioral health culture changed for women in the field during your time in the profession?

It has been a privilege to serve in the field of behavioral health for over two decades and witness growth and changes in the field for women, including increased number of women in leadership roles, increased focus on culturally sensitive and inclusive care. Women brought unique perspectives, skills and experiences to inform policies and enhance holistic approach to care. Over the years, I have experienced working with increased number of women leaders in the field who are championing diversity, equity and inclusion work and leading initiatives to address social determinants of health. Overall, I had the privilege of working with many women leaders who were instrumental in driving innovation and trauma informed care in response to various challenges and to address systemic challenges to care. Many of my women role models taught me inclusive leadership style, creating space for diverse voices to be heard, valued and empowered to create team approach to addressing behavioral health issues tailored to the needs of the individual and their family. Increased opportunities for women in the behavioral health field has impacted the landscape of behavioral health, making it more inclusive, responsive and compassionate.



Was there another woman/mentor/figure that inspired you in your work? If so, who was it and why did she inspire you?

As a young girl I grew up in a family of strong women who modeled grace, ability to overcome adversity and embrace opportunities presented by life's challenges. My grandmother survived World War II and shared with me many stories about her experiences as a young girl. I learned from her kindness, compassion, resilience, strength and perseverance. Above all she raised my amazing mom who taught me to meet people where they are, value their unique perspective and ensure all have space at the table.

What impact have women had on behavioral health in the way we provide service?

Women had significant impact on service delivery through bringing unique experiences, vision, challenging and addressing biases, and paving the path to future women leaders.

What changes have you seen in behavioral health because of women "shaking the table"?

The changes have been instrumental over the years, particularly in the areas of trauma-informed care, social justice and representation, tailored approach to mental health needs, ongoing advancement of holistic approach to care and many other positive impactful changes.

The year is 2124. ACBH leadership is opening a time capsule that was created and filled in 2024. What did you place in it?

ACBH mission and vision statement; as well as a few personal stories of individuals with mental health challenges, who were served by multiple systems of care – challenges they experienced, what worked well in their experience with the system and what could be done differently.