

## Executive Summary:

Overview: RUHS-BH rapidly deployed <https://takemyhand.co> peer support live chat to engage essential workers along with community members experiencing stressors and uncertainty during a global pandemic.

Challenge: Due to heightened levels of anxiety within the community, RUHS-BH Peer Support Specialists experienced higher call volume and expressed feelings of uncertainty and fear from consumers, surrounding the ever-changing conditions of COVID-19. The Department was seeking solutions to meet the needs of the community and essential workers with a physically distanced approach, engaging and connecting community members with peer support services, creating an engagement process that would remove the barriers of behavioral health stigma.

Solution: <https://takemyhand.co> was early in the development process, but the infrastructure was in place. Advocacy to the Executive Team led to a rapid deployment plan to activate the site's features, offer peer employees, sent home to work remotely, opportunities to work as Peer Operators on the live peer chat platform. These employees volunteered to support the site during non-tradition work hours, alongside serving their consumers from clinics. Deploying the site as a 24/7 operation, open and free to any member of the public, became a life line and beacon of hope to people who would not routinely seek behavioral health supportive services, due to stigma-related influences.

Innovation: The BH tech team went to work to rapidly deploy the **Take My Hand™** website interface. The Peer Support Specialists received unique training and support to respond to chat questions virtually, provide assistance and connection to resources via live chat. **Take My Hand™** allows the user to remain anonymous if they choose. Peer Support Specialists operating **Take My Hand™** now have the unique abilities to navigate conversations in a text modality, exercising the ability to clarify potentially confusing interactions due to lack of visual and para-verbal communication cues. **Take My Hand™** is the first web-based service uniquely “Live” with a real person with lived experience of behavioral health recovery on the other end of the conversation, uniquely

trained to be there for a person who may not be open to in-person, Skype-style or telephone verbal communication. Marketed to essential workers and underserved populations in Riverside County, with billboards, bus skins and bus stop surrounds, **Take My Hand™** attracted thousands of new visitors.

Results: **Take My Hand™** website operated 24/7 in a 10-week testing phase, in the months of April and June of 2020. From April 27 through May 27, 2020, there were unique **Take My Hand™** Website Visitors numbering 2,867. From May 28, 2020 through July 5, 2020 there were unique **Take My Hand™** Website Visitors numbering 2,963. 5830 people, who may have never engaged with a behavioral health service in the past, felt comfortable enough to reach out, due to its welcoming label-free platform, available to anyone needing support. The site was evaluated by University of California, Irvine from May 20, 2021 to July 15, 2021, with the website Peer Operators available 24/7 and specific marketing strategies were deployed, increasing **Take My Hand™** activity, specifically between the hours of 10am and 10pm. Weekend activities increased as well. The site has remained in service and **Take My Hand™** smartphone app is currently in development.

Replicability: The CalMHSA Tech Collaborative “Help@Hand” is in talks with 3 other Counties who are actively pursuing **Take My Hand™** as an opportunity to participate in a cross-county collaboration, adding **Take My Hand™** to their service systems locally. CalHOPE is already in development, adding the **Take My Hand™** technology to their website under a FEMA grant. Their live chat is a direct result of the innovative work done in Riverside County on **Take My Hand™**.

Program Contacts: Shannon McCleerey-Hooper 951-955-7117 [SMccleereyH@ruheal.org](mailto:SMccleereyH@ruheal.org)

Maria “Martha” Moreno 951-955-7360 [MMoreno@ruhealth.org](mailto:MMoreno@ruhealth.org)

Video information: <https://youtu.be/UZXfnqoX-2E> <https://youtu.be/9Ht94xAPNdc> (Spanish)

<https://losangeles.cbslocal.com/video/program/1430/4540496-website-provides-mental-health-support/>

Marketing: <https://takemyhand.co/html/marketing/TMHMarketingCSAC2021.pdf>