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Spring 2008

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Connection Recovery Program Coming to New Mexico

Arriving soon to New Mexico is the long-awaited NAMI Connection Recovery Support Program. NAMI Connection groups meet weekly for ninety minutes, and are offered free of charge to any adult who has a mental illness. These groups provide a place that offers respect, understanding, encouragement and hope. The group meetings are also conducted by trained facilitators who have mental illnesses. This support group offers a casual and relaxed approach to sharing the challenges of coping with a mental illness in an environment of caring and uncritical acceptance. Thanks to Laura Hand of NAMI-NM, NAMI-National awarded a grant to NAMI New Mexico to begin this program.

The first step in implementing this program is to find thirty persons throughout the state who are willing to undergo facilitator training offered by NAMI National. This training will occur in Albuquerque this spring. By April, information concerning the support groups' meeting places and times will be available through NAMI NM at 260-0154. A second training will happen in the fall. If you would like to be considered for a facilitator position, contact Lorette at 260-0154.

NAMIWalks Sets High Goals!

By: Laura Hand

We are well on our way to making our goal for the NAMIWalk! This year we established \$100,000 as our goal. At this writing, we are right at \$60,000! This is primarily sponsorships, and it is now time to start putting our attention into establishing teams online. Our combined team goal is \$50,000, which should be easy to reach. In order to do this, we need to form 50 teams with goals of \$1,000 each, or 25 teams with goals of \$2,000 each. The goal of \$1,000 is relatively easy to raise. It is amazing how willing people are to donate to this cause. You only need twenty walkers on your team donating \$50 each, and it's done! Also, many people like to donate the kilometer sponsorship of \$250 in memory of a loved one, or in honor of a loved one. If you would like to do that, please contact Kim Ahlbom at 260-0154.

If you missed the NAMIWalk kickoff luncheon, here are some pointers on setting up your own online team website. This ten-minute exercise is the simplest way to raise money. People

appreciate the ability to give at their own convenience, and it gives them an opportunity to use their credit

card to make the donations.

This is our fifth NAMIWalk and we are hoping 2008 is the year in which we surpass our goal and have to raise it! It is currently the only fundraiser that NAMI-NM has for keeping its programs going. Additionally, forty-five percent of the money raised by each affiliate goes to that affiliate, so this is an excellent way for individual affiliates to bring in some extra money. The money retained by the state will be used to expand educational programs like Family-to-Family, IOOV, Peer-to-Peer, and the new Connection program. We are also trying to raise enough money to support a much-needed Executive Director for NAMI-NM in the near future. We hope you will join in this effort to keep NAMI vital throughout the state!



NAMIWalk Details:

Check-in beginning at 7:00 AM North end of Albuquerque Academy at the parking lot of Hoffmantown Church (8888 Harper NE). From the intersection of Wyoming and Academy, go east on Academy to Ventura. Turn north on Ventura and go 1/4 mile. Turn left into Hoffmantown Church Parkinglot. Parking is available in the northeast quadrant of the parking lot at Hoffmantown Church - 8888 Harper NE.

Location:

Albuquerque Academy

Albuquerque, NM

Date: May 3, 2008

Distance: 5 K

Check-in: 7:00 am

Start Time: 8:00 am



severe depression to "just get over it, get on with life; deal with it," was like asking someone with cancer to heal themselves. It was like leaving someone bleeding on the side of the street without calling an ambulance. I didn't know that clinical depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder are some of the mental illnesses for which the symptoms look like disoriented thinking, erratic behavior, or emotional problems - but in reality are biological ill-

WHAT THE STIGMA OF MENTAL ILLNESS LOOKS LIKE

DESIREE WOODLAND, MOTHER OF RYAN WHO DIED MAY 1, 2006

Unwittingly I perpetuated the stigma - I didn't know what mental illness was, what it looked like, nor did I think about the people with it. I didn't know that mental illness is a real biological illness and not a choice. I didn't know that asking someone with

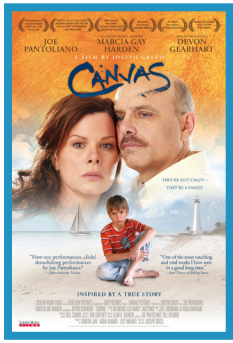
nesses that require medical treatment.

I have learned that there is a continuum along which mental illness occurs. Levels of illness range from mild to severe. Depression is one of the most common. It is more than just sadness, which we all experience from time to time. It is a deeper, lingering inability of the brain to release the chemicals that allow human beings to process the stresses of life. At any place along this continuum, treatment could help ameliorate the symptoms. Unfortunately, because of the stigma that exists, most people don't want to admit that they are ill. Truthfully, who would want to, when it is seen as a weakness of character or constitution? Many people suffer in silence because they too believe the lie. After my son's diagnosis 2 years ago of possible schizophrenia/delusional disorder I still didn't know. I thought that Ryan could just take a pill and somehow miraculously ...return to us as the full human being he had been before. I believed that this was the cure - no more of this delusional thinking and arrested development. But for some people even the strongest antipsychotics cannot change the brain and make it work better. Medications have improved and do make a significant difference for most people. Unfortunately even when medications work complications can occur if the person stops taking them, sending them into psychosis once again.

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Canvas: A Movie Review

BY: LAURA G. BROOKS, ALBUQUERQUE



Last June, attendees of the NAMI national convention in Washington D.C. were given a private screening of a new film, *Canvas*, by writer-director Joseph Greco. Starring Marcia Gay Harden (winner, Academy Award, Pollock) and Joe Pantoliano (winner, Emmy Award, *The Sopranos*) and introducing the

young actor Devon Gearhart, the film portrays a family dealing with mental illness.

Canvas is about a young boy, Chris, (Devon Gearhart) who is coming of age in Florida. His dad, John, (Joe Pantoliano) is a hard-working construction worker. His mother, Mary, (Marcia Gay Harden) is a talented painter. She also has increasing

bouts of paranoia and delusions. The film realistically depicts the struggles of the three family members. Mary insists she doesn't need to take her medication because she's "not crazy." Chris tries to stay focused on his friends and school, while enduring taunts from his peers over his mother. John is in the middle, trying to care for his wife and raise his son.

Each family member has a different way of coping. Chris begins sewing newfangled shirts that win him friends; John begins building a sailboat for his family. Mary continues her painting, because, she says painting keeps her from hearing voices. Incidentally, all the paintings used in the movie were made by real-life people with mental illnesses.

The film is based on Joseph Greco's own life; it is filmed in his hometown of Hollywood, Florida, and reflects his own mother's struggle with schizophrenia. In a personal statement, Greco said that as a child, he was, "embarrassed, angry, and frustrated." He also said there were times when he couldn't even talk about her illness without getting

upset. Greco started writing the script while he was working on *Titanic* with James Cameron; it is his first feature-length movie. Like *Titanic*, *Canvas* is also formed around the metaphor of a boat. The sailboat in the movie is a symbol of the overarching hope, love, and unity of the family. Making the movie was a way for Joseph Greco to confront and make peace with his own memories about his childhood. *Canvas* won many awards upon its release, dominating as an audience favorite at film festivals including the Ft. Lauderdale Film Festival and the Sedona Film Festival.

Canvas is a touching and heartfelt movie. The movie will be shown at a fundraiser for Casas de Vida Nueva on Saturday May 17th at 2pm at the UNM Continuing Education Bldg at 1634 University Blvd. NE. Tickets at the door- \$10- \$8 for students-call 681-0774 for more information.

If you can't make the fundraising event, it is now out on DVD and is available to rent through Netflix and in Albuquerque at Hastings and Hollywood Video.

ASSISTED OUTPATIENT TREATMENT PANEL DISCUSSION

New Mexico is one of eight states that does not have an Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) law. NAMI-Abq April education meeting will be a panel discussion exploring AOT. What is AOT, who will this law apply too, how will consumers rights be protected, etc., and where does this stand in the legal system and future legislative initiatives. Please join us Tuesday, April 8, at 7 pm in the NAMI-Albuquerque offices at 6001 Marble NE. to learn more about this controversial law.

Book Review: *Crazy: a father's search through America's mental health madness*, by Pete Earley, Published by G.P. Putnam's Sons, NY, 2006

REVIEW BY ROSALIND ARDEN

"Carl," I said, "if the police had taken you to the hospital and asked you if you wanted to be given medicine, would you have gone willingly?"

"Hell no! When you're crazy like that, your paranoia sinks in and you think everyone's trying to poison you" ...

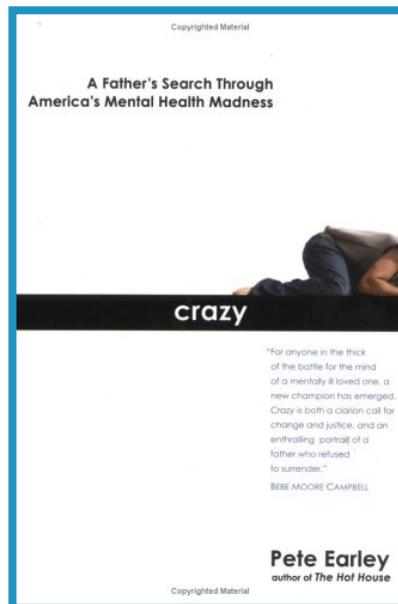
"... So you would have rather been left alone on the streets than forced to take medicine?"

"Yes and no. I would have been angry and fought, but if they had stuffed pills down my throat, I would have kissed their asses and thanked them once I got my mind back, because no one wants to be crazy like that".

Pete Earley's utterly compelling book, which everyone interested in mental illness in America should hurry to read, starts with the story of his own son Mike. The tale will resonate with many NAMI members: a bright and beloved child begins acting a bit oddly. Oddly turns kooky. Kooky gets close to jail-time. Mike's family, hurt and frightened, ask what's going on, why is this happening, what can we do about it? Sounds familiar?

An ex-Washington Post reporter, Earley did what he knew best when his son decompensated – he became an investigative journalist. His quarry: America's treatment of the mentally ill. He went to a jail in Florida to as part of his goal to learn

about the present and past of treating the mentally ill. We all know that many incarcerated people have severe mental illness. Earley went to meet some of them as well as their carers and custodians. We meet a heroic psychia-



trist whose caseload affords him just seconds per patient. We meet people with severe mental illness dizzied by swinging around the revolving doors between street, hospital and prison. How did we end up with the system we have?

Many turns and switchbacks in how we respond to mental illness are archived in a nation's legislation. Earley hunts out some of the protagonists and their relatives who were involved

in key pieces of mental health legislation. This part of the book is particularly gripping; it is also current as it reflects on proposals in New Mexico for mandated treatment. A success of this book is that topics like 'the law' which might appear distant and national feel local, immediate and personal. Earley keeps his eye on the fact that it's always about 'the people'.

People with mental illness are not consumers – you don't buy schizoaffective order online, nor in stores, yet somehow, despite burdens that would make many of us crumble, many people with profound mental illness somehow cope. There is a gentle heroism in this shouldering which comes across quietly in this book. Instead of ascribing roles of victim and bully to people or institutions, the story unwinds with a nuanced and questioning style. This promotes one of Earley's goals – we get a sense of how mental illness affects those diagnosed, their families, health care professionals, and even legislators.

Like the NAMI family-to-family education courses, *Crazy* gives the reader a taste of how it feels to have a chronic thought disorder or paranoia. You won't escape being moved and distressed by what you read, but somehow, and I haven't put my finger on how it's achieved, you'll also be inspired. It's a page-turner – no small triumph for a non-fictional account of mental illness. *Crazy* offers no magical thinking, no quick fixes, but perhaps in rejecting the stigma, recognising the role of community and care in recovery, the future seems hopeful; a place worth exploring.

NAMI-ALBUQUERQUE BOARD – 2008

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Stigma of Mental Illness

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... For Ryan, his healing was not to be on this earth. My precious son, 24 years old, took his own life only nine months after being diagnosed - never giving himself or his family the time to learn about mental illness or to learn acceptance.

A new paradigm is needed for understanding mental illness. As a society we need education because we believe the lie - we don't understand the biological nature of this illness. The majority of people who have a family member with mental illness or are afflicted themselves, suffer and struggle in silence, not feeling the support of society at large. In the media we often hear only the stories about people with mental illness who commit violence. The reality is that the percentage of persons with a mental illness who commit violence is no greater than those without it. We judge and make assumptions about people who are depressed as lazy or making excuses. We must educate ourselves - organizations like NAMI are making a difference. We must stop stigma whenever we hear people referring to persons with mental illness as 'that crazy', 'that schizophrenic', or 'those manic-depressives'. These are people who have an illness - they are not the illness. We must speak up when jokes are made, and not refer to our own lapses of memory as 'losing our mind' or 'craziness'. These metaphors perpetuate the stigma. We must remember the seriousness of someone struggling against their broken brain and relying on medication to make a difference in their lives. To quote Marja Bergen, the author of a book on mental illness recovery called *Riding the Rollercoaster*, "We have come to believe, along with society, that our disorder reflects our personality. We should remember that such ideas result from the stigma society has wrongfully attached to mental illness. There is no relationship between our illness and our self-worth".

This illness is something lived with day in and day out - perhaps year in and year out unless the illness goes into remission. This can and does happen, as with other biological illnesses. Let us not forget the determination and perseverance it takes to learn to live with mental illness and the acceptance that must take place in the individual and their family before treatment can really begin. I am working with a therapeutic farm called Casas de Vida Nueva whose mission is to help those learning to cope with, understand, and live with a mental illness. The farm will offer fresh air, open space and natural beauty. This therapeutic environment will enable people to focus on recovery through psychiatric services, forming community, and building practical skills through meaningful work on the farm. For more information see the website: www.cvnfarm.org

Mental illness affects all people, from all walks of life. It afflicts without regard to socioeconomic status, race or gender. So, it is up to each of us to lead the way in reducing the stigma that is attached to the diagnosis of a mental illness. It is up to us to educate ourselves, our families and friends about exactly what mental illness is - that it is an illness like any other and it is treatable. Ryan would have benefitted so much from the opportunity to live on the farm, learning to live with mental illness, and maybe also learning how to rediscover his potential.

Finding Services For Loved Ones, By: Janice Ladnier

(Ms. Ladnier will present her story at the NAMI Albuquerque Education Meeting on May 26th)

Finding services for loved ones with a disabling mental illness is one of the greatest challenges for families and case managers in New Mexico. Outpatient support services are frequently inadequate, but long-term residential treatment services are totally non-existent. As a result, adults who could have a high quality of life with daily supervision and medication monitoring instead fall through the cracks and can become a danger to themselves and/or others.

Developmentally disabled adults can obtain services through the DD Waiver, but there is no "MI Waiver" available for persons with a debilitating mental illness.

When I first began advocating for a client with severe schizophrenia, I was accused of violating my client's rights by trying to locate a highly supervised setting for

her instead of agreeing to her discharge to her own apartment or a boarding home. I became acutely aware of the double standard for mentally ill persons, since no one ever suggested that my clients with severe mental retardation or autism should be placed in such

unsupervised situations.

After a 15-month struggle to obtain better services, my client now is in her own apartment in the community with 24/7 caregivers. She is happier and higher functioning than she has ever been, and has made great progress repairing relationships with estranged family members. I will share the story of my journey through the bureaucracy and red tape that resulted in this change.

I will also report on the recent efforts by representatives from the major state agencies and providers to discuss the creation of a MI Waiver for New Mexicans with a disabling mental illness who require a higher level of care.

Janice Ladnier, Executive Manager of Guardian Angels, LLC, is a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (LPCC), a professional registered guardian, and a geriatric care manager in Santa Fe. For over 25 years Janice worked in law offices as a paralegal in several states. She is currently under contract with the New Mexico Office of Guardianship to serve as guardian to incapacitated adults who are indigent, many of whom have a diagnosis of severe mental illness. For more information, visit Guardian Angels' website at www.guardianangelsllc.com or call Janice at 505/995-8333.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Family Support Group, every Tuesday, at 7 pm., 6000 Marble NE, Suite #7 (except on the second Tuesday of the month if replaced by an educational meeting as noted in the events calendar).

April 8th - "Assisted Outpatient Treatment" - panel discussion on the controversial issue of mandated treatment, Tuesday, April 8th.

May 3rd - NAMI NM's fifth annual fundraising walk. Please join NAMI's Campaign for the Mind of America and walk together to raise money and awareness about our country's need for a world-class treatment and recovery system for people with mental illness.

May 13th - Finding services for loved ones with a disabling mental illness. Presentation by Janice Ladnier, Executive Manager of Guardian Angels.

May 17th - A fundraiser for Casas de Vida Nueva on Saturday May 17th at 2pm at the UNM Continuing Education Bldg on University Blvd. NE - Tickets at the door- \$10- \$8 for students- call 681-0774 for more info.



National Alliance on Mental Illness- Albuquerque

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