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A Funny Side of Mental Illness

Over 500 people attended the CSB's Mental Health Month event *I'm Okay, But You Need Professional Help: Using Humor to Fight Stigma*. Led by David Granirer, founder of Stand Up for Mental Health, counselor and comedy coach, five local people living with mental illness presented comedy routines about themselves and their illness, something that most so called "normal" people would never do. They faced their biggest fears and delivered jokes crafted from painful experiences of mental illness.

Granirer said, "In comedy, the more screwed up you are, the more problems you have, the funnier your act is going to be. All the stuff in your life that's weird is a huge strength. There's one guy that all the comics are jealous of because he has the perfect act: He has schizophrenia, he's Muslim, and he likes to dress in women's clothes. In comedy, that's gold!"

Dana Payne, a comic from the event and CSB board member, lives with chronic clinical depression. She said, "Friends are always giving me advice like 'You should exercise more.' So, I thought I'd practice diving off the 395 overpass." Dana shared how this program affected her:

It was a mountaintop experience. Empowering, trite though that word may be, is how it made me feel. I don't often (Like never!) feel so purely proud of myself without thinking 'Oh, big deal, you didn't make a million dollars or something,' or 'They were just clapping to be nice to the pathetic mentally ill girl,' or other self put-downs. It didn't matter



The Comic Troupe: Greg Pearson, Susan Johnson, David Granirer, Dana Payne and Clarence Johnson.

what anyone thought. It was my own opinion of myself that mattered. All the laughing and clapping were icing on the cake. I went up a level in my journey to mental health and in my self-esteem. This program is such a great one. Somehow, it gets us where we live.

Members of the audience watched in awe as the nervous new comics (one reported shaking like a leaf) delivered masterful, hilarious stand up routines. One guest said, "I walked away a changed person. I used to feel sorry for people with mental illness, but now I understand that mental illness is just a part of who they are."

This event was co-sponsored by The Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria, Friends of the Alexandria Mental Health Center and Comcast. Funding was provided by a Recovery Fund grant, donations from Friends of the AMHC, and a generous donation from Sheehy Honda. For more information, visit standupformentalhealth.com.

David Granirer on Stigma



In anti-stigma campaigns, people with mental illness are portrayed as capable, sensitive and intelligent, but the public doesn't care about that. They just want to know that we won't hurt them.

If I did an anti-stigma commercial it would go like this: "Hi folks, my name is David and I have a mental illness, but I won't hurt you. Not 'cause I'm a good person, but 'cause it's hard to attack you when I'm too depressed to put on my pants. The worst violence you'll ever get from me is a passive aggressive sigh or a guilt trip. Yes folks, you're safe around me, 'cause my personality disorder makes me too self-absorbed to realize that you exist.

But the real problem isn't that the public is scared of us, it's that they're not scared enough. If they were really scared they'd make sure the government provided enough tax dollars for treatment. So I think the campaign should go like this: Don is freaking crazy. You may have seen him hanging out in your alley while the voices tell him to burn down your house. There are 58 more of him within a two block radius. Isn't this worth increasing your taxes? Or would you rather pay more for fire insurance?

Outstanding Employee Awards

Each year the CSB recognizes employees whose work and dedication have been extraordinary during the previous year. The CSB salutes these award recipients and our many other outstanding employees.

The Access Award is for individuals who have worked to decrease barriers to service and enhance the sense of welcoming for clients. Individual- Liz Wixson.

Group- Substance Abuse Outpatient Staff: Barbara Arnold, Judi Booker, Lenny Brisendine, Kim Burson, Finnie Caldwell, MaLinda Dennis, Laurie Ferreri, Carmen Getty, Rick Gross, Jaime Henao, Gouss Joseph, Tony Muccio, Shawnita Seau, Thurlow Stenson, Jonathan Zeitlin.

The Esprit Award is for individuals who have taken actions that resulted in savings in time, labor, space, equipment or supplies. Jim Fleming and Berline Juleau.

The Continuous Improvement Award is for individuals who have implemented a creative idea that improves programming, treatment or the work environment.

Individual- Lenny Brisendine.

Group- Health Information Management Team: Kay Lennett, Juanita Morris and Vernon Stansbury.

The Cultural Competency Award is for individuals who have incorporated the cultural backgrounds, values and preferences of clients in the delivery of services.

Individuals- Amalia Quiñones and Denise Velez-Vogel.

The Collaboration Award is for individuals who have worked to partner with others by helping peers, mentoring or covering services and working with fellow employees in a spirit of teamwork.

Individual- Claudia Limache. Group- Intellectual Disability Case Management: Martha Boyer, Sean Garrick, Herman Edmonds, Carol Jones-Gaiter, Harry Wachsmuth.



The Stewardship and Accountability Award is for individuals who have significantly improved efficiency,



*Suzanne Chis,
DHS Director of Family Services (far right)
with her daughter Allie and friend Blake.*



Jim Flemming, Fiscal Officer.

Youth Who Beat the Odds



The Foundation of the Alexandria Bar Association hosted its sixth annual “Beat the Odds” awards program. Modeled after the Children’s Defense Fund Program, this celebration rewards the successes of youth aged 13-21 who have overcome adversity or



tragedy and have achieved educational or vocational goals while giving back to their community. Above, Iris Brown, a participant in the CSB’s System of Care Program, and LaTisha Arrington, a CSB Counselor Aide, were recognized for beating the odds. Each was awarded a scholarship.

The Stewardship and Accountability Award is for individuals who have significantly improved efficiency, created savings in time, labor, space, equipment or supplies and conserved taxpayer dollars. Melissa Johnson and Ben Toma.

The Outside Collaboration Award is a new award for an individual not employed with the CSB who has worked with the CSB in a spirit of teamwork to attain CSB goals and participated in a successful public-private partnership. Suzanne Chis, Department of Human Services.

The Phill Bradbury Award is for the individual who has produced lasting change in clients, supervisees or the community; made outstanding efforts to lessen the negative effects of disabilities in the community; or has been instrumental in helping clients move toward recovery. Catherine Cook.

The Lifetime Achievement Award is for CSB employees in good standing who have retired or announced their forthcoming retirement and who have personified the CSB’s values through their work and dedication. Linda Darrell and Harry Wachsmuth.

Effects of the Economic Downturn on the CSB

by Jim Fleming, Chief Fiscal Officer

As the City and State adjust to lower revenues, so is the Alexandria CSB. When the CSB began planning for the budget that began July 1, 2009, the total estimated revenue reductions were \$1.75 million, or 5.7% less than the budget from the previous fiscal year. City Council reinstated \$300,000 to the CSB's budget, which allowed for the restoration of some services.

The CSB entered FY 2010 with \$1.45 million in reduced funding. This will decrease service capacity across the continuum. The final listing of reductions can be found on the City's website.

Deliberations over which services to reduce focused on minimizing the effects on persons currently receiving services. Yet, it was not possible to maintain current service levels. The listing of the final reductions shows which programs that will lose staffing or funding, but it does not provide the full picture of how the economic recession will disrupt services. With limited financial flexibility, the CSB may need to reallocate staffing as vacancies occur or needs increase in programs serving consumers with the highest level of immediate need.

During the past fiscal year, the CSB was asked to implement mid-year reductions; therefore, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that this may occur this fiscal year. In early May, the State announced that the revenue picture was worse than believed, and that additional cuts may be needed. Also, the City's April financial report indicated that actual revenues are 2% lower than originally budgeted. There are signs that the economy may be bottoming out, but there is a lag between economic indicators and governmental revenues.

This financial stress will continue for the next several years. The CSB will not be able to serve the same number of people or serve those with less urgent needs. In an attempt to mitigate the impact, the CSB continues to work with an ethicist in identifying a framework for prioritizing services, program managers continue to review caseloads to ensure persons with the most acute needs receive services, and staff continue to pursue other funding options. These efforts will ensure we continue to act as the safety net for the residents of Alexandria.

Rebuilding Together Alexandria



Members of Grace Community Church volunteered through Rebuilding Together Alexandria to paint two Alexandria CSB condominiums. These condominiums are the homes of persons with disabilities who participate in the CSB Residential Program, where they receive drop-in support to enable them to live independently in the community. Volunteer Todd Wills said, "We are always looking for ways to give back and be involved with the community. We were excited to be able to work with such a great organization."



Celebrating Client Successes



Every two months, a group of residents from the CSB's Mental Health and Substance Abuse Residential Program meets with the program director, Juliette Milushev. These clients form the Advisory Committee and represent the approximately 125 persons in the Residential Program. The Advisory Committee forwards ideas to the CSB about how programs and services can be improved and in turn, they receive updates about the Residential Program administration.

This year, the Advisory Committee headed a spring cleaning by encouraging fellow residents to organize, donate and discard clutter from their homes. The Committee also organized a ceremony to recognize the major accomplishments of program participants. Two persons who graduated from college and three residents who moved to more independent housing were celebrated.



(Front): Committee Members Afework Eshetu, Mary Ellen Rippy
(Back): Committee Members Linda Allen, Anthony Crews, Craig Pearson and Program Director Juliette Milushev, .

Spring for Alexandria

A team of 18 Alexandria CSB employees, joined by councilmember Rob Krupicka, participated in *Spring for Alexandria*, a community-wide half-day of service. Hundreds of volunteers provided services at sites throughout the City. Team CSB worked at a Carpenter's Shelter where they organized donations and assembled bags of personal hygiene products to give to homeless persons.



(Back) Jane Hassell, Rob Krupicka, Jenifer Cohen-Cordero, Lynn Fritts, Elaine Edge, Carol Layer, Aberra Sumamo, Sorin Cetina, Judy Carter, Maggie Ross, Mike Gilmore, Phenories Massenburg, Eileen McClung, Jocelyn Mitchell. (Front) Claudia Limache, Yorvska Salazar, Connie Juntunen, Deborah Warren, Julie Frye.

To make comments, suggestions of story ideas or contributions, call Jennifer Cohen Cordero at 703.746-3484 or email jennifer.cohen-cordero@alexandriava.gov.



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