

Mental Illness:

IT AFFECTS EVERYONE



WELLNESS • RECOVERY • RESILIENCE

MENTAL ILLNESS

It affects everyone

Mental illness impacts people of every background, color and age. One in four people suffers from mental illness — it could be your brother, sister, mother best friend or you. In any given year, approximately 2 million adults, seniors and children in California are affected by some form of a potentially disabling mental illness. Left untreated, a mental illness can drastically change one's quality of life and cause individuals and families suffering and devastation. Yet, many people affected in California struggle to afford treatment and care due to cost-cutting measures enacted 30 years ago. In 2004, California voters approved Proposition 63, a ballot initiative imposing a 1 percent tax on residents with incomes greater than \$1 million. Prop 63 is transforming the state's mental health system by becoming an important source of funding and expanding the care and treatment available.



A NEW BEGINNING

Young man finds acceptance after recovery

BY
Kendall Fields
Photo by Anne Stokes

Patrick shivered on his driveway, fading in and out of consciousness in the damp, cold Vietnam winter. Blood dripped from the thirteen wounds on his naked and battered body. He was humiliated. “What the hell did I do that he had to abuse me like that?” the 13-year-old thought as tears streamed down his face.

When Patrick was 1 month old, his mother abandoned him to move to the United States; he was left with a family member who started drinking.

When Patrick was 6 months old, he began to be physically abused.

Patrick cringes as he describes the thick, metal dog chains that he was whipped with. “All I wanted was to be a good boy and [to be loved] and [for] my mom to come back — somebody to just save me from all of the torture,” Patrick says.

“The first step to recovery is talking about it. Then you need a support system and hope to know that everything is going to work out.”

Patrick

As the years went by and the extreme abuse continued, Patrick struggled with thoughts of suicide. At the same time, he started questioning his sexual identity, which caused his friends and family members to ostracize him because of their conservative beliefs. Patrick's greatest source of comfort was his paternal grandmother who cared for him and made him feel loved. After her death, Patrick overdosed on pills, hoping to die and escape his loneliness.

A schoolmate's mother found Patrick unconscious, took him to the hospital and helped him recover. He says it was she who helped him realize that his continued physical abuse was not normal.

When Patrick was 15, he fought back.

From the day Patrick grabbed a baseball bat and swung back at his family member in self defense, he was never abused again.

After years of minimal contact, Patrick was 17 when his mother brought him to the U.S. to live with her and her new husband. Patrick worked hard to learn English and live up to his mom's high expectations. For months, despite excelling academically, his mother did not approve of him. Patrick says she simply could not accept the fact that he was attracted to men. He decided to move in with his aunt in Southern California. It was there that he came out and told his aunt he was gay. Patrick was shocked when his aunt told him that she already knew; Patrick's mother, however, was not so accepting.

Looking for acceptance, Patrick continued to suffer from emotional abuse. He moved to Sacramento to live with another aunt who had children close to his age. When Patrick was 20 years old, he fell into a deep depression and cut his wrists in another attempt to kill himself. “I just felt like I couldn't breathe.”

Patrick talked to his mother and she helped him get in touch with a doctor, who diagnosed him with post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. Both diagnoses, Patrick explains, are common among abuse victims.

With medication and therapy, Patrick began to heal. “I asked myself, ‘How do you just decide to stop living?’”

Patrick credits his recovery to the support of his ESL teacher, who he says is more like a mom to him, and to his aunt in Southern California who encouraged him to go to school and allowed him to be himself.

“The first step to recovery is talking about it,” Patrick says. “Then you need a support system and hope to know that everything is going to work out.”

Today, Patrick is positive and eager to see what the future holds for him. Patrick works as a youth counselor at a mental health agency in Sacramento to help other youth through problems like his. He was recently accepted into UC Davis and will be the first in his family to attend college. Beaming, he says, “My aunt is so proud. I finally feel accepted.”

BECOMING A BETTER PERSON

Man finds new meaning to life during recovery

BY
Kendall Fields
Photo by Mike Blount

Seventeen-year-old Christopher sat in the doctor's office, after being hospitalized for three days, shocked at what his doctor was saying about his mind. "Do you know what schizophrenia is?" his doctor asked. Christopher was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder and Bipolar II. "But I just remember being confused and thinking that there is no way I could hate a doctor [for giving me bad news]." Later, when his doctor explained the signs, Christopher says it all made sense.

"In medical terms [schizoaffective disorder] means I have rapid thoughts, which I do," Christopher explains. "I also have disillusionments sometimes."

For the next 11 years, Christopher felt lost. He took methamphetamine eight times, tried mushrooms and LSD, and he was drunk "for a while."

When Christopher moved to Placerville, he remembers feeling like he didn't fit into the tight-knit community. There were times, he says, where he was doing very well financially, but he didn't have structure in his life. "I didn't have healthy relationships," he says, looking down at his folded hands. "I just didn't have the happiness that came with doing well financially."

Christopher lost his job and started hearing voices. He shut himself in his Placerville home for two weeks, only sleeping for 24 hours.

About two years ago, Christopher's family took him to the emergency room and placed him on another three-day hold. Christopher doesn't remember whether he took LSD or if he was just hallucinating as a symptom of his schizoaffective disorder. His family encouraged him to get help through El Dorado County's services, and Christopher decided it was time to take control of his own life.

"I'm just trying to be a better person," Christopher says, smiling. "At first [getting help] was scary because I didn't know if I could prevent myself from doing bad things. I wasn't sure if I had the confidence to overcome it."

But, Christopher did. He attributes many of the positive outcomes to the support of the El Dorado County Mental Health Outpatient Facility and his case manager. Christopher says his case manager inspires him to do things that people don't think you are capable of.

Today, Christopher has been sober for 18 months. He says he is in the middle point of his recovery and is taking medication that helps control the symptoms of his mental illness. He is not letting his mental illness define him. He says he is staying focused and attends the clubhouse at the outpatient facility for support. "I thought I wasn't ever going to get better," he says, "but I am better off now than I was then."

"I'm looking forward to good things now and I'm learning how to be a good person."

Christopher

In 2011, Christopher graduated high school. Now, he volunteers at the outpatient facility and is a great example to his peers of someone who is on the path to recovery.

But Christopher says he most enjoys spending time with his 6-year-old son and is thankful to be able to teach him things like skateboarding and fishing.

As he continues on his path to recovery, Christopher is looking forward to spending more quality time with his son and says one day that he would like to go to church.

"I'm looking forward to good things now and I'm learning how to be a good person." Christopher adds one piece of advice for others who are struggling, "Don't look at life like love runs out. Don't keep running. Don't let love run out."



El Dorado County Mental Health Programs

Mental Health Services, Psychiatric Health Facility is a therapy office located in Placerville. At the psychiatric facility, psychologists focus on the evaluation, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental health issues. Psychologists are concerned with the different aspects of behavior and mental processes. A clinical psychologist uses psychotherapy and other counseling skills to improve emotional and mental health.

Health and Human Services Mental Health Division of El Dorado County
Local: (530) 621-6290
ACCESS—Toll-free: (800) 929-1955
From El Dorado Hills: 916-358-3555 ext. 6290
CRISIS HOTLINE: (530) 622-3345

GIVING BACK AFTER RECOVERY

*Formerly homeless woman becomes peer counselor
to help others deal with mental illness*

BY
Marion Millin
Photo by Anne Stokes

Michelle grew up in Placer County. At age 21, she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. At age 23, Michelle was treated for cancer and told she would never have children. She was in the hospital, bald-headed and holding her newborn niece.

Michelle became homeless, was in and out of treatment, and went on and off her medications. “What can I say, I was a frequent flier,” Michelle says. She was uncooperative with those trying to help her. “I was out of control. I didn’t realize the effect I had on people.”

“I feel that giving back keeps me humble and grateful for what I have and all that I have been given, including the ability to rise above a very challenging disability.”

Michelle

“I was afraid I wouldn’t be able to have a relationship with [my niece]. I thought, if I don’t straighten up, I’m gonna lose my family.”

But, Michelle’s real turning point came three years later. She was told she wasn’t leaving the mental hospital. “The doctor wouldn’t budge. I was exhausted, manic. I couldn’t talk my way out of it this time. It brought me to my knees. I agreed to work with everybody that was trying to help me, instead of working against them.”

Twelve years later, she is determined to maintain her health and help others.

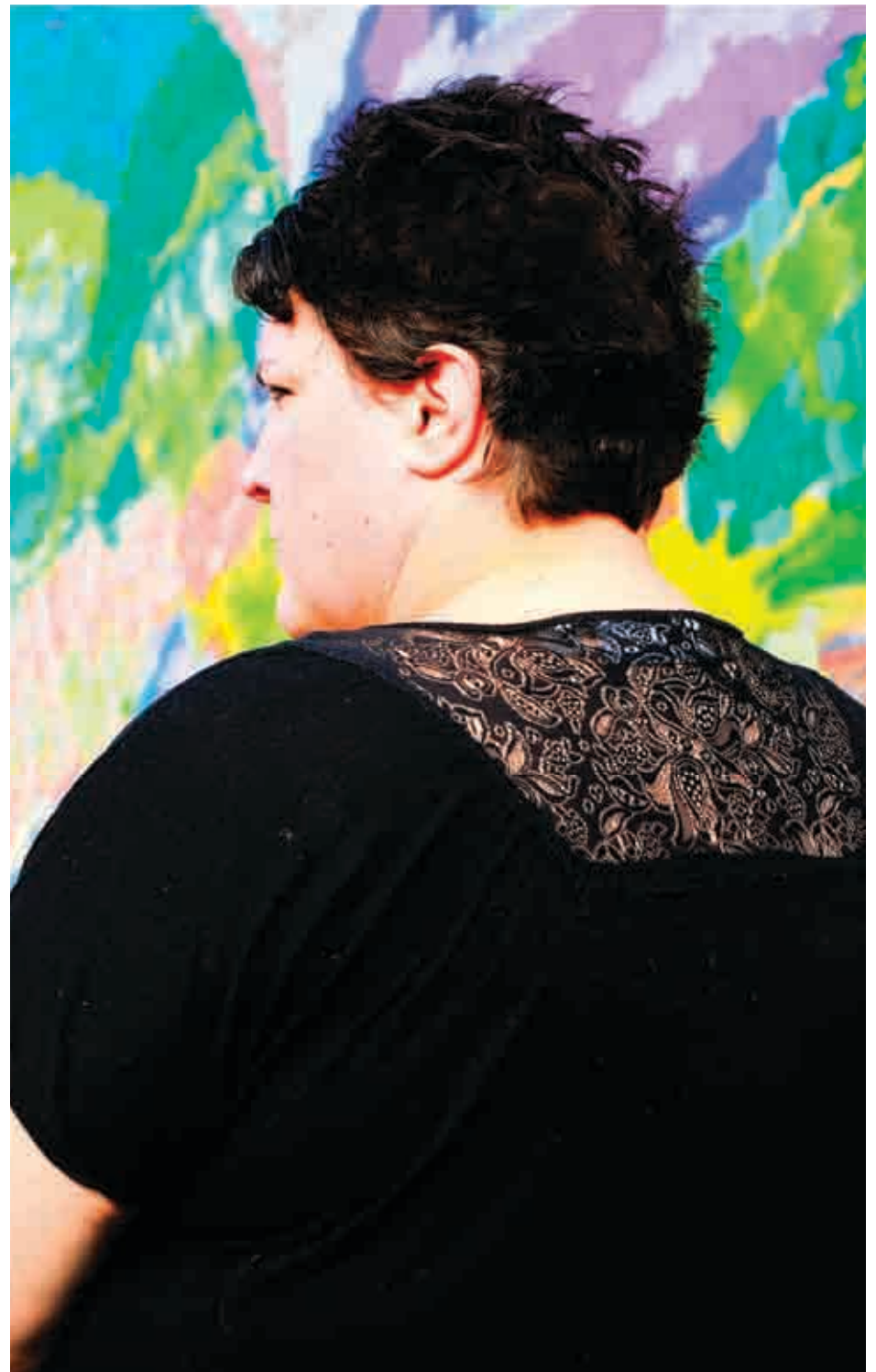
Michelle is a peer counselor with Advocates for Mentally Ill Housing. AMIH is a nonprofit corporation that provides housing and life skills programs to adults with mental illness in Placer County. Michelle says her dedication to helping others is pivotal to her recovery. “I feel that giving back keeps me humble and grateful for what I have and all that I have been given, including the ability to rise above a very challenging disability.”

Following two decades of reductions in public mental health services, and the resulting increase of homelessness, California voters passed Proposition 63 in 2004. Prop 63, the Mental Health Services Act, emphasizes transforming the mental health system and improving the quality of life for Californians living with a mental health illness. Prop 63 saves both lives and money; a recent UCLA report shows that for the type of services that Michelle received, there is a cost savings of \$1.27 for every Prop 63 dollar spent.

“Working with AMIH really knocked it home for me. They gave me a roof over my head when I was young and bratty. Giving back to others and helping them find a voice makes me feel like I can accomplish something positive.”

“I’m glad they never gave up on me.” One of the people who helped her at AMIH is very special to Michelle. “Every year I hand-deliver a Christmas card to her, with a photo of me and my son.” Michelle’s “miracle son” is 9 years old. She is devoted to providing a stable life for him. “I don’t want him to have the life that I had.”

“It’s worth it. It’s worth the hard work. As daunting as mental illness is, it’s worth fighting for your sanity.”



Placer County Mental Health Programs

The Placer County Network of Care website provides information about Placer County services and community events, with a searchable Service Directory, a Learning Center for various health topics, a community calendar, message boards and social networking. Documents and videos are available in several languages including Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Tagalog, Soomaali, Polish and Portuguese.

Placer County Mental Health Services
Local: (916) 787-8860
ACCESS—Toll-free: (888) 886-5401
<http://placer.networkofcare.org/mh/>

South Lake Tahoe Office
Local: (530) 573-7970
CRISIS HOTLINE: (530) 544-221

REMOVING THE STIGMA

Woman speaks out about mental illness

story & photo by Mike Blount

When 21-year-old Amanda moved away in 2009 and started attending college in Chico, her parents were fearful. Her relationship with them had been strained since she was 16. At the time, Amanda remembers feeling isolated and having trouble expressing herself; her doctor told her she was clinically depressed but she says the symptoms never seemed to fit how she felt. She drifted further apart from her parents and felt even more alone. Her parents were not sure what was happening to their daughter and were scared knowing she was moving away to college.

While at college, she began to experiment with illegal drugs, which, as she found later, exacerbated the symptoms of her mental illness; combined with feelings of increased paranoia, it caused her to cut off all communication with her family. Amanda retreated further into her illness, losing touch with reality.

“I beat a lot of odds that I was told I wouldn’t and side effects that are supposed to be irreversible. . . . I feel like I’ve gotten [wiser] and stronger because of my experience.”

Amanda

She had a psychotic break.

In one day, Amanda spent \$5,000, dropped out of school and believed she was being filmed for a TV show. Her friends, concerned by her actions and state of mind, took her to a nearby psychiatric treatment center for help. There, she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder with psychotic features — her break triggered by intense stress from the culmination of several difficult things happening at once.

“At the time I arrived, I was still in a state of mania,” Amanda says. “I didn’t think I was a patient there. I thought I was a doctor and I still believed I was just playing a part for a TV show. . . . Everything was a delusion or paranoia.”

Amanda’s parents moved her from Chico to Sutter Hospital in Sacramento, closer to home. Doctors deemed her to be gravely disabled and she began a three-month stay for treatment. “I started to get scared,” Amanda says. “That’s when I really wanted to get out of there. I started to get really aggressive and it took four or five doctors and nurses to hold me down to keep me from going really crazy.”

Amanda says the next thing she remembers is waking up much later. She felt as though she’d “never be the same person again” and the medication she was taking made it difficult to remember anything she had learned before. She eventually went home with her parents where she was able to reconnect with them and spend time recuperating.

In the following months, things improved for Amanda. She credits her recovery to getting on the right medication and becoming involved with the National Alliance on Mental Illness Peer-to-Peer group, a program funded by Proposition 63.

When Amanda describes how her mental illness nearly destroyed her life just a few years earlier, she doesn’t hold anything back. To her, it isn’t something to be ashamed of but rather a source of strength that has encouraged her and continues to motivate her. Amanda currently serves as the youngest member on the board of NAMI, she’s working on finishing her degree at UC Davis and she’s a sought-after speaker on the subject of mental health. But like so many others affected by mental illness at a young age, Amanda says she struggled to understand what was happening to her.

Amanda is also an outspoken advocate for early diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. She says her experience has given her the perspective and confidence to speak out.

“I feel very blessed to have the life that I have now with everything that happened previously,” Amanda says. “I beat a lot of odds that I was told I wouldn’t and side effects that are supposed to be irreversible. . . . I feel like I’ve gotten [wiser] and stronger because of my experience.”



Yolo County Mental Health Programs

Yolo County Department of Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services provides a range of mental health services to community members of all ages, including adults, older adults and youth. Services are aimed at helping individuals with serious mental illness live as contributing and successful members of their families and communities. Services are provided to clients through outpatient clinics and Regional Resource Centers in Woodland, West Sacramento, and Davis, school-based sites, and through a network of community agencies and independent providers. The department also provides a range of alcohol and drug prevention and treatment services.

Yolo County Mental Health
Local: (530) 666-8630
ACCESS—Toll-free: (888) 965-6647

GETTING RID OF THE FEAR

Woman overcomes mental illness and becomes advocate for peers

BY
Bryce Brown
Photo Courtesy of Turning Point
Community Program Providence Center

For decades, Rachel lived in constant fear that people were stalking her. Rachel, who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, recalls believing that a woman was trying to poison her beloved service dogs Pickles and Mango. She had frequent outbursts, some of them violent. Her hallucinations became so bad that she even made several attempts at taking her own life.

Rachel acknowledges that these attempts were cries for help. Two years ago, she made her most serious attempt. She ground up some pills, dissolved them in water and then drank it. She knew that the doctors would pump her stomach and, having studied chemistry at Cal, she knew that dissolving the drugs in water and drinking them would ensure the most efficient delivery of the drugs into her bloodstream. “As I was waiting there to die, I started looking in my dog’s eyes and it just broke my heart,” she remembers.

She called her caseworker from Turning Point, a Proposition 63 supported program she had received services from in the past. After that, she remembers nothing except waking up in the ICU several days later; Rachel says she was thinking clearly for the first time in years. “I was, honest to God, sane,” she says. “It was like going from another planet to this planet. I wasn’t a raving lunatic anymore.”

For years, Rachel has been battling her PTSD, which was misdiagnosed as schizophrenia earlier in her life. Because of this misdiagnosis, Rachel was never on the right medications, her symptoms worsened and she eventually tried to take her own life.

Through a combination of medication and therapy, Rachel is recovering. As she recovers, she needs less medication. “The reason I’m needing less and less anti-psychotic [medication] is because I’m getting to the bottom of the memories of what happened to me,” she says. “I’m getting them out in the open and discussing them instead of keeping them hidden and having a shame-based identity. The more I talk through what happened when I was young, the less anti-psychotic [drugs] I need.”

Rachel feels fortunate to have the support of her caseworker and the encouragement to recover through the Turning Point Program.

Rachel now leads a group at Nevada County Turning Point called “Our Voice Matters,” which is dedicated to providing support for clients and fighting the stigma associated with mental health disorders. “There’s such a terrible stigma associated with mental illness,” says Rachel. “When people find out that you have mental health issues, it’s like you lose your citizenship. Suddenly, people look down on you and you are a foreigner.”

“... Even if someone goes around shouting out things and breaking things and things like that, there’s still a person inside there. There was a person inside me ... These people really brought me back to the other side and they saw the person inside me and they didn’t give up.”

Rachel

Rachel says she wants to be an advocate for others suffering from mental health disorders because they can’t stick up for themselves. “I really love the people here. And even if someone goes around shouting out things and breaking things and things like that, there’s still a person inside there,” she says. “There was a person inside me when everybody initially gave up at the beginning. These people really brought me back to the other side and they saw the person inside me and they didn’t give up.”



Nevada County Mental Health Programs

Nevada County is very accepting when it comes to diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders. Programs such as Turning Point, which began in 1976, offer a broad range of support for those who are in the greatest need. Many of Turning Point’s employees are individuals who are in recovery themselves. This practice helps to inspire those who are in the early phases of their recovery by offering hope. Turning Point offers treatment and assistance as well as housing for individuals and their families. While proper diagnosis of mental health disorders is important, so is the proper treatment of such disorders. Programs like Turning Point ensure that treatment is correctly administered.

Nevada County Behavioral Health
Local: (530) 265-1437
ACCESS —Toll-free: (888) 801-1437
CRISIS — (530) 265-5811

A SERENDIPITOUS REUNION

*Woman suffering from mental illness is reunited
with her children after years apart*

story & photo by Mike Blount

For several years, Susan had a hard time trusting anyone she met. She rarely spoke to anyone and even though she had a home in Sacramento, she chose to stay outside overnight, often in the rain and cold. To a passerby, the 54-year-old mother of two appeared homeless — sometimes, camping outside for days at a time — but Susan was suffering from paranoid schizophrenia, a mental illness that caused her to believe she was constantly under threat.

Susan says she was in contact with her daughters following a divorce from their father, but a life of heavy drug and alcohol abuse exacerbated the symptoms of her mental illness. Her contact became more infrequent and then two years ago, everything fell apart.

Her paranoia increased to the point where she was driven to wander for longer stretches of time, unsure of who and what she was running from. In the past, she had always ended up back at her home. But Susan says she stopped taking care of her finances, including paying her rent. She vanished. Thus began a two-year stretch of homelessness that took Susan out of contact with her family and reality.

“I’ve been doing methamphetamine, pot and alcohol since I was 15,” Susan says. “I was scared and nervous a lot because of the mental illness and I wasn’t taking care of myself like I should. I just started wandering and didn’t know where I was going to end up.”

Susan recalls her daughters, not knowing where they could find her, later told her they thought the worst had happened when they heard a report that a homeless woman who matched her description had been found dead in a field. Susan’s brother-in-law went to verify the identity of the body, but it turned out not to be Susan. Relieved, they continued to search.

A policeman eventually found Susan wandering down the street and acting erratically. She was brought to a local hospital for an evaluation and officially diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. She began receiving treatment and was also introduced to a caseworker with Transitional Community Opportunities for Recovery & Engagement (TCORE), who helped her get an ID and a Social Security card, and put her in touch with her family again after several weeks of diligent searching.

“I was scared and nervous a lot because of the mental illness and I wasn’t taking care of myself like I should. I just started wandering and didn’t know where I was going to end up.”

Susan

Susan was reunited with her two daughters and her five grandchildren — including a new grandson who was born while she was away — at an Adult Day Care Center. It was an emotional moment for Susan, who says she was finally in a place where she could reconnect with her family and deal with her mental illness.

Today, Susan sees her family often. She says she’s happy to finally be able to live a “normal life” and encourages others going through similar struggles to find help.

“Your life does get better if you reach out for help.”



Sacramento County Mental Health Programs

Behavioral Health Services is Sacramento County’s mental health department that offers mental health services to area residents — alcohol and drug treatment services, specialty mental health services and assistance for persons unable to care for their personal needs or financial resources. Behavioral Health Services are facilitated by a committee of system-wide partners: consumers, consumer liaisons, family members, advisory board members, county staff and community-based organizational providers. The organization’s goal is to provide a culturally relevant system that promotes holistic recovery, optimum health and resiliency in order to improve lives of not only the individuals seeking help, but also the community at large.

Sacramento County Mental Health
Local: (916) 875-1055
ACCESS—Toll-free: (888) 881-4881



WHAT IS MENTAL ILLNESS?

By
Kendall Fields

Someone you know is probably living with mental illness. You may not even know about it, because the shame and stigma that surrounds mental illness prevents many people from talking about it or even seeking help to improve their lives. And if that someone is you, you might be reluctant to tell anyone.

No one is immune from mental illness. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in every four adults and one in five children will experience a diagnosable mental disorder during their lifetime. The World Health Organization reported that four of the 10 leading causes of disability in the U.S. and other developed countries are mental disorders. By 2020, major depressive illness will be the leading cause of disability in the world for women and children.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in every four adults and one in five children will experience a diagnosable mental disorder during their lifetime.

Mental illnesses are medical conditions that disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others and daily functioning. Just as diabetes is a disorder of the pancreas, mental illnesses are medical conditions that often result in a diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life. Serious mental illnesses include major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and borderline personality disorder. Mental illnesses can affect persons of any age, race, religion or income. Mental illness usually strikes individuals in the prime of their lives — during

adolescence and young adulthood. Harvard Medical School researcher Ronald Kessler conducted a national mental illness study, which indicated that half of all lifetime mental health disorders start by age 14 and three-fourths start by age 24. Although all ages are susceptible, the young and the old are most vulnerable. Mental illnesses are not the result of weakness, lack of character or poor upbringing.

Mental illnesses are treatable. With appropriate and individualized treatment, most people can recover from their mental illness and lead productive, independent lives. Early identification and treatment is crucial, accelerating recovery and minimizing further harm.

But, according to a report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, fewer than one-third of adults and one-half of children with a diagnosable mental disorder receive mental health services in a given year. Without treatment, the consequences of mental illness for the individual and society are staggering, leading to things like unnecessary disability, unemployment, substance abuse, homelessness and suicide. Plus, the

economic cost of untreated mental illness is more than \$100 billion each year in the United States, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

A large part of this lack of treatment can be traced to the stigma society has developed about mental illness that perpetuates fear in affected individuals. The stigma erodes confidence that mental disorders are real, treatable health conditions. We have allowed this stigma to develop — but it has to stop now. It's time to embrace those who are struggling — and remember that it could be your friend, your coworker, your spouse, your child — even you.



RESOURCES

In crisis? 24-Hour Crisis Lines

Sacramento County: 24-Hour Toll Free (888) 881-4881
Yolo County: 24-Hour Toll Free (888) 965-6647
El Dorado County: 24-Hour Toll Free (800) 929-1955
Nevada County: 24-Hour Toll Free (888) 801-1437
Placer County: 24-Hour Toll Free (888) 886-5401

Suicide prevention number: (800) 273-TALK (8255)

Suicide Prevention

www.suicideispreventable.org

Pain isn't always obvious. Every day in California friends, family and coworkers struggle with emotional pain. And, for some, it's too difficult to talk about the pain, thoughts of suicide and the need for help. Though the warning signs can be subtle, they are there. By recognizing these signs, knowing how to start a conversation and where to turn for help, you have the power to make a difference — the power to save a life.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

(916) 567-0163
www.namicalifornia.org

NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization, is dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. NAMI advocates for access to services, treatment, support and research and is steadfast in its commitment to raise awareness and build a community of hope for all of those in need.

Mental Health America of California (MHAC)

(916) 557-1167
www.mhac.org

MHAC works to ensure that all Californians in need of mental health services have access to the appropriate level of services at the appropriate time by creating a forum for providers of care, advocates of patients, and family members of people living with a mental illness. MHAC works to educate state and local leaders and lawmakers on the importance and cost-effectiveness of mental health care.

United Advocates for Children and Families (UACF)

Hope Line (877) ASK-UACF (275-8223)
www.uacf4hope.org

UACF is a non profit organization with a mission to improve the quality of life for all children and youth with mental, emotional, and behavioral challenges and to eliminate institutional discrimination and social stigma.

Network of Care

www.networkofcare.org

Network of Care is a highly interactive information source where consumers, community-based organizations and municipal government workers all can go to easily access a wide variety of important information.