



OpenMindsOpenDoors is a Pennsylvania initiative aimed at ending discrimination against people with mental illnesses. People with mental illnesses have the same needs -- and the same rights -- as everyone else. And, as with most other illnesses, people recover, lead productive lives, and make valuable contributions to society. OpenMindsOpenDoors develops programs to educate people about mental illnesses; to foster tolerance among peers, educators, communities, and families; and to advocate for the legal rights of people living with psychiatric disabilities. The campaign is centered around five messages:

PEOPLE LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES HAVE THE SAME NEEDS AS EVERYONE ELSE.

Basic needs such as food and shelter, and more advanced needs as well. Meaningful work, decent and affordable housing, a suitable public education, and acceptance by family and peers matter to each of us. Yet, the stigma associated with mental illness, and discrimination against people living with a mental illness, often prevent these needs from being met. According to the 1999 U.S. Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health, "stigma leads people to avoid socializing, employing, or living near persons who have a mental disorder."

PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES DO RECOVER AND LIVE PRODUCTIVE LIVES.

"Recovery" means different things to different people. It could mean being able to hold down a job. It could mean working to one's capacity. It could mean returning to school. Or, it could mean having a close relationship with family and friends. Whether recovery comes from medication, from traditional therapy, from alternative treatments, or from prayer, one common theme is a feeling of responsibility for one's life and a sense of control over one's problems.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE MENTAL ILLNESSES MAKE VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIETY.

Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill experienced depression. Nobel laureate John Nash lives with schizophrenia. Actress Patty Duke and musician Peter Gabriel live with manic depression. Overcoming the stigma associated with a mental illness, seeking and getting treatment, and being part of a support network enable people living with mental illnesses to reclaim their lives and to enjoy meaningful careers.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PEOPLE WHO HAVE MENTAL ILLNESSES KEEPS THEM FROM SEEKING HELP.

Mental health is as important as physical health to the overall well-being of individuals and societies. Yet only a small minority of the 450 million people living with a mental or behavioral disorder is receiving treatment.¹ While one in five Americans lives with a mental disorder in any given year, half of those with a severe mental illness received no treatment in the past 12 months.² In a recent survey of people living with mental illnesses, almost 80 percent of respondents indicated they worried a great deal about people learning about their illness and reacting negatively, leading a similar percentage to expend considerable effort to keep their mental health treatment a secret.³ These same people reported discrimination in school, in their housing, in the community, and at work.⁴ Fear of disclosure, rejection by friends, and discrimination are among the reasons why people with mental illnesses tend to stay silent, instead of seeking help.



QUOTES

"What helped me to recover was not drugs ... it was people. I had a psychiatrist who always believed in me, and family and friends who stood by me." (Washington Post, 2/12/02)

-Dan Fisher, M.D., Ph.D. has been married 23 years, is the father of two, and is the founder of the National Empowerment Center. Fisher is living with schizophrenia.

"... I forget the truth of the world, which is that mental illness scares people. No matter how open I am, there are still people who are disgusted by me, even horrified ... which makes me unbearably sad."

(The Philadelphia Weekly, 11/28/01)

-Liz Spikol is an award-winning journalist and the Managing Editor for The Philadelphia Weekly. Spikol is living with manic depression.

"One reason nobody knows about recovery is that most folks don't tell anybody because the stigma is too great." (Washington Post, 2/12/02)

-Frederick J. Frese III, Ph.D. has been married 25 years, is the father of four, and holds faculty appointments at several universities. Frese is living with schizophrenia.

"Stigma hurts, but discrimination is illegal. Both unfortunately are part of daily life if you have a mental illness."

-Shelley Eppley Bishop is married, is the mother to three children and one-step son, and is the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers' Association, an organization she helped organize. Bishop is living with major depression.

Despite the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act and other civil rights laws, people with mental illnesses face discrimination in the workplace, at school, and in their communities. In a recent survey, 37% of people with mental health problems reported that they had faced discrimination when looking for work; and 47% had experienced discrimination at work.⁵ Further studies indicate that employer-provided mental health benefits decreased by 54% over the past decade, while benefits for general health decreased by only 7%. In fact, during the same period, the number of health plans restricting hospitalization for mental disorders increased by 20%.⁶

Breaking down the stigma of mental illness can close the door on discrimination. And open it to opportunity -- the right to affordable housing, equal opportunity employment, and a public education. For those living with a mental illness it's a journey from shame and isolation to dignity and responsibility.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO COMBAT STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION?*

- Avoid disrespectful language about any group of people.
- Refer to the person, not the illness. Sue might be a person living with schizophrenia, but she is not a schizophrenic. Remember, the mental illness is only a part of the person.
- Listen to people who are living with a mental illness.
- Emphasize people's abilities, not their limitations.
- Talk openly about mental illness and the stigma associated with it.
- Contact your elected officials and demand that discrimination against people living with mental illnesses be stopped.

ABOUT US

OpenMindsOpenDoors is coordinated by the Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania with support from the following statewide mental health stakeholder organizations:

Mental Health/Mental Retardation Program Administrators Association of Pennsylvania

National Alliance for the Mentally III -- PA

Parents Involved Network of Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Academy of Family Physicians

Pennsylvania Association of Rehabilitation Facilities

Pennsylvania Community Providers Association

Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers' Association

Pennsylvania Psychiatric Society

Pennsylvania Psychological Association

Other contributing organizations include:

Chester City Consumer Center

Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania

NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania

Contact us at info@openmindsopendoors.com for more information on you can become involved in this campaign.

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¹The World Health Report 2001, "Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope," World Health Organization, 2001. ²America's Mental Health Survey, National Institute of Mental Health, 2001. ³Otto F. Wahl, Ph.D., The Bell (newsletter of the National Mental Health Association). Study examines consumer experiences with stigma, December 1999. ⁴Ibid. ⁵Jim Read and Sue Baker, "Not Just Sticks and Stones: A Survey of the Stigma, Taboos and Discrimination Experienced by People with Mental Health Problems," Mind, 1996. ⁶Senator Paul Wellstone (D-MN), citing an independent study by the Hay Group. Congressional Record, April 14, 1999. ⁷Some material from this section was excerpted from "Ten Things You Can Do To Fight Stigma" by Otto F. Wahl, Ph.D.