



# NEWSLETTER

Summer 2002

## A Beautiful Mind

*“I withdrew into a world of delusional thinking and was bombarded with hallucinations, real only to me. I was full of suffering, loneliness and unhappiness. We who have schizophrenia are on the fringe of society—we’re ridiculed, laughed at and treated as non-persons.”* When the movie *A Beautiful Mind* came out, it earned mostly cheers from consumers for its respectful portrayal of Nobel Laureate, John Nash, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia at age 31. The public’s misunderstandings of mental illness can have a damaging effect on consumers’ sense of self worth and also on their treatment. Supportive community programs require an educated community.

Schizophrenia is probably the most distressing and disabling of the severe mental disorders. It affects between 1 and 2% of people, and the first signs typically occur in males between ages 16 and 25 and in females between 25 and 30. People with schizophrenia suffer from difficulties in thought processes, which can lead to hallucinations (especially hearing voices), delusions (clinging to bizarre beliefs that defy reason), and thought disorders (disorganized and fragmented thinking often leading to incoherent and illogical speech).

Because these effects are so confusing to families and friends, people affected with this illness often limit interactions with other people and may withdraw from the outside world. Schizophrenia tends to come and go in cycles of remission and relapse, and people often experience apathy and lack of motivation (often wrongly attributed to laziness) and feelings of depression (about 10% commit suicide). People with this illness do not have “split personalities” and the great majority of people who suffer from schizophrenia are not dangerous to others. They are far more likely to become victims of violence and crime than to commit violent acts themselves.

The illness is not caused by poor parenting or weak will power. Symptoms arise from a failure of the chemical processes in the brain to function properly. It is a complex illness thought to be the result of faulty brain biochemistry and a combination of factors such as genetic influences, trauma or injury to the brain at or around the time of birth, and other effects of social isolation and stress. Medications and other treatments for schizophrenia, when used regularly and as prescribed, can help reduce and control the distressing symptoms. However, some people may prematurely discontinue treatment because of unpleasant side effects. Even when treatment is effective, lost opportunities, stigma and residual symptoms may continue to prevent people with schizophrenia from living normal lives.

As a foundation for more productive and satisfying daily lives, Options staff work to enable people with schizophrenia to experience success and gradually build upon these successes to increase skills, empower themselves and improve their functioning. As skills are developed, people are then helped to improve the quality of their lives by finding jobs or other meaningful and productive activities in their communities.

The depiction of schizophrenia in *A Beautiful Mind* may help destigmatize public perception of the disease for years to come. John Nash, through medication, the support of his wife and a flexible job as a professor at Princeton, was ultimately able to enjoy a productive life after decades of struggle. Changing our view of mentally ill people is a difficult task, and while *A Beautiful Mind* may not fully achieve this goal, it does send a message of hope that is an important step in the right direction.

## **Options for Southern Oregon:**

- Currently provides case management for 98 clients.
- Currently provides employment and educational support for 93 clients.
- Currently provides over 500 rides a month to Oregon Health Plan eligible people.
- Currently houses 64 people in six affordable housing complexes in Josephine, Jackson and Douglas Counties.

To learn more about what Options does and to meet our staff, log on to our new website

[www.optionsonline.org](http://www.optionsonline.org)

## **Charitable Bequests**

More and more people are thinking of nonprofit organizations in their wills, insurance policies, annuities and trusts. A charitable bequest is a wonderful way to recognize an organization that has made a difference in your life or in the life of a loved one. A professional advisor such as a lawyer, financial planner, accountant or insurance agent can advise those who are interested in leaving part of their estate to a nonprofit agency.

## **From the Director . . .**

I'd like to share a success story with you. One of our consumers, John, 55, spent many years in Damasch, the state mental hospital. When the hospital closed in the early 80s, John was released to Grants Pass where he has since lived in foster care. Diagnosed with schizophrenia as a young man, he hadn't finished high school, had worked part time in the hop fields and bucking hay and never had a driver's license. He began coming to Options Day Treatment Program and one of our staff recruited him to water our fruit trees. He was faithful about the task and proved to be a dependable worker.

Along with the deinstitutionalization movement, came a philosophical shift in the treatment of mental illness which suggested that people become better integrated into their communities if they work in a competitive job than if they work in a sheltered workplace. The thinking was that sheltered work actually served to protect and insulate people from the stresses of day-to-day life and created two unintended side effects: it fostered long-term and unnecessary dependence on the mental health system, and it discouraged people from trying to resume their normal lives in the extended community. This theoretical shift resulted in the startup of our Employment Works Program in the spring of 2000, and we subsequently closed our Day Treatment Program.

John's Employment Coordinator began advocating for him to get a paid job. He agreed, got the job, has shown up regularly and on time, and continues to be a dependable worker. When asked how he was going to spend his first paycheck, he responded, "I'm going to put it in the bank." However, it was discovered that he didn't have a bank account, so his Employment Coordinator took him to a supermarket to cash his check. He immediately went to a friend's to repay a debt for three packs of cigarettes that he had borrowed. Next, he went to the DMV and was issued the first ID card he's ever had. He was thrilled.

Partly because he's shy and partly because of his illness, John has been easily overlooked and people haven't recognized how capable he really is. This is only one example of how the Employment Works Program helps people with psychiatric disabilities resume their normal lives as friends, neighbors, students, spouses and tax paying co-workers. Since the program began, we've contacted 432 employers, created 66 job opportunities, helped place 15 volunteers and assisted 13 people to return to RCC. Now that's what I call a success story!

## **Options Expands Board of Directors**

Three new members have joined our Board.

We wish to extend a warm welcome to:

- Jennifer Ausland
- Lana Faszler
- Jim Huber

## **Options Board of Directors**

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