



NEWSLETTER

Winter 2002

What is Mental Illness?

Mental Illness is greatly misunderstood (and often misdiagnosed). It can be a terrifying and bewildering experience for those afflicted and their loved ones. Mental illness might make it difficult or impossible for a person to fulfill the ordinary responsibilities and roles of day-to-day life. And to make it worse, the stigma of mental illness serves to increase the sense of alienation from family, friends and the surrounding community.

Adults with severe mental illness might be limited in their ability to perform certain fundamental tasks such as shopping for groceries, interviewing for a job or maintaining relationships with family or friends. They may experience severe impairment in their ability to function adequately in everyday roles such as worker, student, friend or spouse. In a large national survey of adults with mental illness, 71% rarely or never participated in social activities with others, only 12% were married, and just 10% were employed. And because mental illness is worsened due to stress, the difficulties of daily life perpetuate a downward spiral of stress, increased symptoms and relapse.

The most common diagnoses of mental illness include depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disease (or manic/depression), obsessive-compulsive disorder and many of the eating disorders common today. The causes can include life trauma, chemical imbalance, and organic or hereditary disease. There is hope, however. Research over the past decade has shown that when an array of services such as social support, psychiatric rehabilitation, crisis support, self-help individual skills training, supported employment and peer support are available, along with case management, supported housing, medication and therapy, the rates of re-hospitalization decrease dramatically and life skills increase.

When this array of services is not available, the likelihood of returning to more impaired levels of functioning and relapse increases sharply. The consequences may include losing housing, employment, financial stability and friendships. Distance from their family and friends may make things worse, and people with mental illness could wind up in the criminal justice system or being victimized or hospitalized. With each relapse, a return to the previous level of functioning becomes more difficult and less likely.

Why Should This Matter To Me?

As a community, we have experienced a shift in responsibility for mental health services from the federal or state level to the local level. Cities and counties, often severely limited in dollars and trained people, have been asked to offer services that hospitals and institutions used to provide. Compassion for others aside, this shift imposes hardships on our community including:

- **An increase in the number of mentally ill adults in jail.** It is estimated that over 7% of all jail inmates (more than one in 14) suffer from serious mental illness.
- **An increase in the number of patients in psychiatric hospitals** for which Josephine County and ultimately the City of Grants Pass are responsible. Public funds for

expensive crisis care decreases the amount available for prevention and for outpatient and children's programs serving a wide segment of the population.

- **An increase in homelessness.** Grants Pass is currently experiencing a serious problem with homelessness, and up to 40% of homeless people also have a severe mental illness.
- **An increase in substance abuse and drug trafficking.** Up to 50% of people with mental illness also have substance abuse problems.
- **An increase in stress on families.** Often the caregivers of last resort, families shoulder the emotional and financial burden of picking up the pieces when a loved one has lost his or her home, job or financial security.

How Does Options Help?

Since its beginning in 1982, Options for Southern Oregon has provided alternatives in the care of chronically mentally ill adults. Options sees the person with a mental illness as an asset not a liability, bringing to the community his or her unique set of circumstances and perspectives. The staff at Options seek to optimize the strengths and abilities of each psychiatrically disabled individual. Through a subcontract with the Josephine County Mental Health Department and in collaboration with the City of Grants Pass and other social service agencies, Options provides a wide range of mental health treatment services including:

- Life skills training including activities of daily living and symptom management
- Case management
- Drug and alcohol abuse education
- Community Integration
- Supported employment
- Supported education
- Supported Housing
- Transportation services
- Advocacy

Constant vigilance in our commitment to identify the strengths of psychiatrically disabled individuals has demanded that Options become creative and resourceful in initiating programs that depart from the customary medical model. People with mental illness want the same things as those of us who live with other long-term illness. Even when our illnesses are disabling, we want to believe that life offers a better future, that we can manage our own illnesses with support from professionals. That's why Options emphasizes hope, autonomy and functioning. That's why Options encourages people to resume normal community roles such as worker, student, spouse, parent and neighbor. Each of Options treatment programs is aligned with this recovery approach. As Abraham Maslow believed, there is a far goal toward which all people strive that ". . . is called variously by different authors self-actualization, self-realization, integration, psychological health, individuation, autonomy, creativity, productivity, but they all agree that this amounts to realizing the potentialities of the person, that is to say, becoming fully human, everything that the person *can* become. . ."

. . . and a good time was had by all

Two hundred people shared a Thanksgiving Dinner provided by Options at St. Anne's Church on Tuesday, November 20. The annual event has taken place since 1984, and every year, more and more people come to celebrate this day of gratitude. Seven turkeys and all the fixin's were

served by Options staff to consumers, their families and friends. The 2001 Options Annual Award was presented to Joe Miller for “Random Acts of Kindness.” This year, members of the local chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) attended. Options wishes to thank Josephine County Mental Health Department and Carl’s Jr. for their support of this annual gathering. We look forward next year to holding the dinner in our newly renovated space on G Street by which time we will have completed the remodel of our kitchen.

Room for Rent

Options now has a wonderful new meeting space that is available to the public. The newly renovated multipurpose room is 60’ x 40’ and can accommodate 100 people. It can be rented for seminars, workshops, conferences or staff retreats. It would also be an ideal site for holiday parties, wedding receptions, family reunions and other catered gatherings. Non-profit organizations get a price break. Come by for a visit or call Charlotte at 476-2373 for details.

From the Director . . .

This is the first issue of The Options Express. Although Options for Southern Oregon has been operating in Grants Pass since 1983, it’s been the feeling of the Board of Directors and staff that many people don’t really understand what we do. Our mission is to “. . . offer innovative programs and services for low-income individuals and people with psychiatric disabilities to inspire hope while supporting their participation as respected members of the community.” But exactly what does that mean? Individual case management involves helping people achieve the important life goals they have set for themselves, such as getting a job, returning to school or living independently. An Options program called “Employment Works” helps people return to school or places them in competitive marketplace jobs. Options has built and manages five affordable housing complexes and is currently building the sixth. In addition to sponsoring these six agency projects, we have collaborated with five other non-profits and assisted in the creation of affordable housing for a variety of special-needs populations including homeless youth, drug and alcohol affected adults and victims of domestic violence. We also participate in TransLink, the new five-county regionalized transportation system that gets people to their medically necessary appointments.

Last year, Options was able to provide direct services to over 450 individuals, contact 320 employers and competitively place 24 people in paying jobs, 20 people in volunteer positions, 56 people in our affordable housing units and provide over 27,000 rides.

We have set high goals for next year in the areas of case management (setting benchmarks for outcomes and continuing fidelity to our strengths-based practice guidelines), the Employment Works program (reducing our waiting list and refining partnerships with community stakeholders), housing (completing the current construction project and continuing to consult with other non-profits needing affordable housing), and transportation (maintaining the availability of inexpensive reliable rides to Oregon Health Plan-eligible people).

Our hope is that through better communication with you, the members of our community, through our new website (www.optionsonline.org) and this newsletter, you can become involved in our heartfelt mission of providing support for psychiatrically disabled people to successfully participate in the life of our community. We hope you will help us.

