



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has."

MARGARET MEAD

Comments from Valerie Dalton Regarding Community Education Seminar

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*Comments by Valerie Dalton, LPC. M.ED. about the community education seminar held in cooperation with **FACES**:*

It was wonderful to meet so many of you who read my column at the community education seminar on June 26th. I've often wondered if anyone ever reads what I write and if my articles make a difference in your lives. These questions were answered for me on June 26th and I hope I was able to answer some of your questions about brain disorders and mental illness.

For those of you who couldn't be with us, here's an overview of the evening.

Much of the stigma around brain disorders and mental illness comes from the way mentally ill individuals, some of whom have committed crimes, are portrayed in the media. Rarely do we hear about the many individuals who are living with mental illness on a daily basis who are making significant and positive contributions to our society. The seminar began with a slideshow of pictures of these individuals.

Mental illness is often misunderstood because few people have ever been educated about the subject. For many, simply talking about brain disorders is a scary and taboo thing to do. To help educate the audience about mental illness, we discussed how common it is; what research tells us about the causes of mental illness; how a diagnosis is made; and the signs, symptoms, and types of mental illness that exist today along with the various types of treatment options.

For every person living with a mental illness there's a family affected as well. Barbara Kunowsky, Executive Director for **FACES**, discussed how support is needed for both the individual dealing with his illness and the family. Some of the suggested steps for families living with mental illness are: find family support, become educated about the illness, be an advocate for the mentally ill, and help support others.

The most meaningful part of the evening was the personal stories shared by four women. One woman shared how her son's bipolar disorder led to his suicide at the age of 20. She hopes that

school teachers, counselors, and coaches will become better educated about the signs and symptoms of mental illness so that earlier intervention might be possible. Another woman spoke about how her son was incarcerated instead of being given the treatment he needed. The criminalization of the mentally ill is, unfortunately, all too often today. Our jails have become treatment facilities for the mentally ill and they are poorly equipped or prepared for this role. Two brave and courageous women spoke about living with mental illness. One lives with schizophrenia and the other with bipolar disorder. Nothing could have given the audience better insight into these disorders than the brave stories these women shared. As the audience watched each of these beautiful women speak, we could all feel the stigma surrounding their illnesses being diminished. Their experiences and stories helped us all to understand how important education, treatment, medication, and family support are for those living with brain disorders.

Prior to concluding the seminar, we discussed community resources that are available to help consumers and their families with mental health issues. If you missed this opportunity to learn about brain disorders, we'll be having another seminar in September. Stay tuned for more details.

This column is for informational purposes only. Clinical issues should be directed to a licensed clinician or your physician. Valerie Dalton, M.Ed. is a Licensed Professional Counselor with a private practice serving adolescents and adults.