

Afraid of the Elephant in the Room

When it comes to a physical illness, we show sympathy and open our hearts to help friends, relatives, and even strangers on occasion. Mental illness, while not manifesting itself physically like many other diseases, is still stigmatized. If you describe mental illness scientifically, it is the illness of the part of brain which is not functioning properly. Unlike other illnesses, we seem to be most afraid of talking about mental illness. Why is mental illness treated so differently by our society?

The silence often facing mental health magnifies the problems people already face with the illness. The stigma of mental illness may lead to people not being as open about sharing their experiences or others not offering as much support to those in need as much as other illnesses. If the brain does not function properly, an individual can have many different conditions, including depression, mania, schizophrenia, anxiety and memory loss. Left untreated, someone may experience extreme stages such as suicidal thoughts and paranoia and phobias of being attacked physically and mentally. Mental illness not only affects the people who have it, it affects their family, friends and our society.

What if the illness was treated before the person had these symptoms? It often can be properly treated with careful monitoring of medicine dosage, psychological help, providing meals and housing and places to go for those left alone. Opportunities for support, individual care, and social connections will help the patient greatly which in turn, will eventually help his or her friends, family and our society.

It seems that the care of those with mental illness is the elephant in the room. Our society tends to not want to think or talk about it and not take care of those facing mental health difficulties; we are trying to sweep the issue under the rug. Instead, it is time to take a good look at this issue. As an example, former Massachusetts First Lady Kitty Dukakis and Governor Dukakis both do great work to open communication of this subject by describing Kitty's depression and her experiences with treatments. We need more of this openness.

There is not much fundraising for the mentally ill community. We strongly need to have more supportive places for those who need mental health services like the Fellowship Place. "Fellowship Place provides a broad range of support services for adults with mental illness" and "offers an eclectic group of programs and services that emphasize wellness, creative expression, giving back to the community, and the importance of social relationships" (source: fellowshipplace.org). The organization provides crucial psychological help and emotional and physical comfort including meals and housing. If we are not afraid of the elephant in the room and work hard together to provide funds for agencies like Fellowship Place, we will move to a better society..

Please support the Fellowship Place. Do not let yourself succumb to the indifference shown towards mental illness. You can donate by mailing a check to Fellowship's address at:

Fellowship Place
441 Elm Street
New Haven, CT 06511

You can also visit their website to find out more or donate directly at: fellowshipplace.org

Inok Magliaro

Bethany resident for 26 years