

Awareness is Dilemma for Community, Mentally Ill

BY SONNY LONG - Victoria Advocate

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People with mental illnesses – and their families and others who try to help them – face a dilemma.

“Yes, we have new medicines, new counseling techniques, and new technology for diagnosis, but the dilemma is awareness,” said Rick Torres of New Beginnings Counseling Clinic. “When one of your kids comes home and he’s talking about wanting to kill himself, or your daughter comes home with a serious drug problem, combined with a mental illness, or you’re having to deal with a senior in your family who’s experiencing Alzheimer’s... then what do you do?” asked Torres.

Torres was one of the speakers during the National Mental Health Month program Saturday at De Leon Plaza. He praised those in attendance for showing an interest in mental health.

“As long as people like you exist and gatherings like this occur, this topic will be brought to the forefront,” he said, also noting the small crowd that gathered at the gazebo. “But look around you, folks. Where is the rest of the community? Where are they? This is one of those topics that this place should be full.”

David Way of the Gulf Bend Center talked about the community’s role in working with the mentally ill.

“It is time to bring attention to remaining barriers concerning mental illness,” said Way. “We continue to see alarming rates of homelessness, incarceration and unemployment of the mentally ill. We need to target these three major community issues. We need to stress the importance of community-based treatment.”

September Lutz gave an overview of the “In Our Own Voice” program offered by the National Alliance of Mental Illness. Lutz and others who suffer from a mental illness, but maintain normal lives, go into schools and churches to tell their stories.

“I am surviving. I’m raising children. I have a full-time job. I’m caring for two elderly parents,” said Lutz. “Mental illness used to control every aspect of me. Every aspect of mental illness, I am able to control now.”

Proclamations from Victoria County and the City of Victoria were also read in support of National Mental Health Month. The program was sponsored by the local affiliate of NAMI.

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