

December 16, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Despite the headlines, those with mental illness are rarely violent and most lead productive, healthy lives

SAN DIEGO—We know the headlines all too well. Students killing other students. Young people shunned by society going on gun-toting rampages in malls and churches. And hostages being taken at campaign headquarters.

According to news stories and “suspect” histories, one thing is said to be held in common—they suffer with emotional disturbances and mental illnesses. Much of it has gone untreated and unrecognized until it is too late.

However, it is of utmost importance to realize one fact that has been confirmed by the surgeon general and other professionals and mental health organizations throughout the nation—those living with mental illnesses are rarely violent and its occurrence is a sign that something has gone terribly wrong with the mental healthcare system.

In truth, those who have mental illnesses are much more likely to be victims of violence or hurt themselves than to hurt others. And society hurts them too—the headlines of violence and mental illness contribute to the isolation, division and stigmatization of those living with mental illnesses. The news and media rarely show people living well with mental illness, when, in reality, the majority of those who do have these diseases have managed them well with medication and therapy and other treatments and are able to lead healthy, productive lives.

Locally, Bettie Reinhardt, executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness in San Diego (NAMI) agrees. “We know more each day about how to help people develop mental wellness. When that becomes common public information the political will to provide a full spectrum of effective mental health services to all our citizens, of all ages, will follow.”

NAMI San Diego is San Diego’s voice on mental illness. This organization shines a light on the stigma attached to mental illness — a stigma that comes from fear due to lack of knowledge. NAMI San Diego is at the center of education, support and advocacy regarding these brain disorders.

The organization offers help with educational support classes on mental illness for both those who have the disease and their family and friends. The Family-to-Family class (offered in both English and Spanish) helps family members untangle the myths of mental illness from the truth. The Peer-to-Peer class is a structured learning process that helps those with mental illness to develop a very important relapse prevention plan. NAMI San Diego offers other classes and support groups, along with educational presentations and outreach.

To put it in perspective, more than 244,000 people are living with mental illnesses in San Diego alone. In the state of California, 600,000 children, adults and elderly are in need of mental health services that aren’t readily available. In our nation, one in five people will suffer from a serious mental illness in their lifetime. It is for this reason that organizations like NAMI San Diego need your support and participation.

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) is a non-profit organization that provides education, support services and advocacy to improve the lives of everyone affected by mental illnesses. Visit www.namisandiego.org or call 619-543-1434 or 1-800-523-5933.

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