



Volume 1, Issue 1, Spring 2005

Center kicks off "May is Mental Health Month" with community newsletter

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Each May for more than 50 years, Mental Health Month has highlighted services that have improved the health and lives of millions of Americans. We want people in the Valley to know that caring for their minds, as well as their bodies, is good for overall health and key to their success at home, at work and at school.

Although people spend far more time addressing their physical health than their mental health, we know that mental illness is more common than cancer, lung and heart disease combined. Untreated mental illness can complicate many minor and serious physical disorders. Breaking down the barriers of "stigma" and caring for our mental health is key to living full and productive lives—and this newsletter has some suggestions on how to do just that.

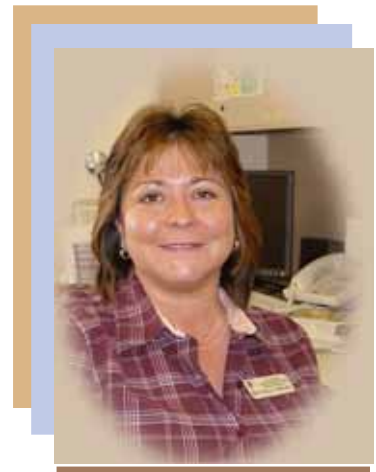
Since May is Mental Health Month, Dr. Mary Trujillo-Young, assistant executive director, feels "This is an opportunity to talk about the services the SLV Mental Health Center provides, to thank the community for their trust and reliance on us and to thank other agencies which have collaborated with us throughout the years." In this first issue of **Mental Health Matters**, readers will find tools and helps with the stigma of mental illness, medication and depression in children, teens and seniors, and information about New Beginning's transitional programming.

The San Luis Valley Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center wants to "be there" for citizens throughout the San Luis Valley, from the Sand Dunes National Park to Creede and all those communities in between. Dr. Trujillo-Young, says "Our energetic and creative staff help us with that."

"Many of our programs have been developed in response to the needs expressed in our community. These services include school based mental health services where our counselors go into the schools instead of requiring the students to come to the center," she says.

"Our staff works collaboratively with the community to bring you, the citizens of the Valley, a rich variety of services." Among others, these include traditional counseling, crisis intervention, domestic violence classes, substance abuse services, women's empowerment, parenting classes and prevention services.

We hope you enjoy and benefit from this mental health newsletter—the first of many going out to our community.



Mary Trujillo-Young, Ph.D
Assistant Executive Director,
SLV Mental Health Center

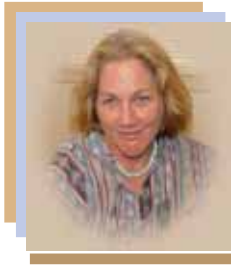


What is stigma?

"Stigma is commonly defined as the use of stereotypes and labels when defining someone. Stigma is Greek for "sign" and it has come to refer to a characteristic or set of characteristics that bring shame to an individual or group who bear this "sign" or stereotyped label. The stigma surrounding these misunderstandings can limit opportunities, it can stand in the way of a new job, it can increase feelings of loneliness, and it can cause many other unfortunate outcomes.

Labels are for boxes—not people.

According to the Surgeon General, the stigma associated with mental illness "is manifested by bias, distrust, stereotyping, fear, embarrassment, anger, and



By Therese Peloquin,
Consumer and Family Advocate

avoidance". -- excerpted from the Boulder Anti-Stigma Project

Breaking the Stigma of Mental Illness—Art Show will showcase local talent

Labels are for boxes—not people.

During May, Mental Health Month will be celebrated by local artists who also happen to have been affected by mental illness. Milagro's Coffeehouse and Southern Peaks Library in Alamosa will be displaying artwork submitted by people who are working to break the stigma associated with mental illness.

Historically, persons who have common illnesses such as depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and anxiety disorder have been marginalized and shunned by society. This kind of stereotyping or labeling by society can be more disabling to the one with the illness than the disease itself. People who have a mental illness struggle to be seen as more than just their disease. A "schizophrenic", or more appropriately, a person with schizophrenia, may also be a brother, a friend, a wife, an artist, a book-lover, or an athlete. Yet stereotypes can limit a person's opportunities in their own community.

Fear, distrust, and bias shown towards people with mental illness can seep into their own family, and finally, into their own self-image—and here, the stigma is perpetuated. A life that could have shown promise and talent is lost to the belief that they are no more than a disease in a book.

In the San Luis Valley, a group of concerned citizens called the SLV AMIGOS (Association for the Mentally Ill: Giving Others Support) has come together to address the issue of stigma against mental illness by offering education, advocacy, and support. The AMIGOS are mostly family members and consumers of mental health services, and are sponsored by the San Luis Valley Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center. Some of the members are trained facilitators of the classes offered nationwide by NAMI (National Association for the Mentally Ill). These classes are designed to offer family members the education and support they need to assist their loved one in living a full and meaningful life.

The AMIGOS kicked off their plan to educate and enlighten the communities in the San Luis Valley with an Open House and Art Show in December, 2004. Featured was a beautiful and moving standing mural called, "Out of Darkness into the Light" created by Leo Tanguma in partnership with mental health consumers from the Denver area. The mural depicted both the anguish of mental illness and the hope found

in a world that believes in and supports recovery. In the winter of 2005 a "Family-to-Family" class was offered in Alamosa; it was attended by around 15 family members hailing from communities as far flung as Manassa and Del Norte. Along with receiving an education on mental illness, advocacy, and self-care; these families found a strong support system in meeting with others who understand what they are going through on a daily basis: caring for a family member with a mental illness. An ongoing Family Support group is being formed—watch for details in the local media.

The AMIGOS invite everyone in our Valley community to be informed and delighted by the art on display during the month of May. Break the stigma of mental illness—keep labels where they belong—on boxes, not people.

SLV AMIGOS' consumer art show runs Mon, May 16th, through the 22nd, at Milagro's Coffeehouse and at Southern Peaks Library in Alamosa.

Understanding depression

Children and teens can be treated successfully



Gregory P. Caesar, M.D.,
Medical Director,
SLV Mental Health Center

The Food and Drug Administration recently required revised labels on antidepressants prescribed for children and adolescents. This information has frightened many young people and their families who worry that treating depression with medications is too dangerous. So **what do you do for young people with clinical depression who need medicine to get better?**

First, let's talk about depression itself. Depression is a serious condition that affects many people of all ages. It interferes with one's ability to work, go to school, enjoy their family, and lead a satisfied or productive life. Depression is under-recognized in our society, and people with depression often do not get appropriate treatment. "Depression itself can be potentially fatal. Suicide sometimes happens when a client is getting good treatment, but it is much more likely when a depressed client is untreated or gets ineffective treatment," said Medical Director Gregory P. Caesar, M.D.

"As a psychiatrist, I am concerned that depression could be diagnosed or treated even less often if we become too afraid of the medications we use to treat it. I believe the fear about antidepressant medicines is exaggerated. When assessment and treatment is done appropriately, using medications to assist in recovery is safe."

Dr. Caesar thinks some of these fears are now emerging because

antidepressant drugs are too often prescribed without a good assessment and with little follow-up. If antidepressants are prescribed to people who shouldn't be taking them in the first place, or if they get the wrong medicine or the wrong dose for their symptoms, we have more problems, he said. **"The first step is to get an accurate assessment.** If the assessment shows *major depressive disorder*, medications are usually appropriate and helpful. Sometimes we also use antidepressants to help with anxiety and irritability, symptoms closely related to depression, but anti-depressant medications may not be appropriate for other problems."

At the SLV Mental Health Center, a full assessment is done of the young person's symptoms, and several types of treatments should help. Dr. Caesar adds, "When medications are needed, we choose one that has been proven to work for the symptoms the client has. We instruct the client to call us right away if they experience any troubling effects from the medication. We also want to monitor the client closely by having the client in regular therapy and checking often that the medication is helping and not making things worse." According to the medical director, if the child or teen gets worse, an adjustment or change to the medicine might be necessary. The client might need to be seen more often or another type of treatment might be prescribed such as hospitalization, if appropriate. "Above all, we want to help young people stay safe and recover from their illness."

"The main point I want parents to know is that clinical depression is a very treatable illness."

Dr. Caesar says, don't be afraid of treatment. Whenever a young person is suffering from clinical depression, parents, friends and teachers should be concerned about the condition getting worse, whether the person is taking medicine or not. **He says, "Anyone who takes anti-depressants should know that in order for the medicine to work, they have to be taken everyday.** If you take them irregularly, it's usually worse than not taking them at all. Taking the medication just off and on causes you to have ups and downs in brain chemicals that can do more harm than good."

No one anti-depressant fits all situations. With the modern medications, many options are available, and a trained medical doctor is the best person to decide which one to use in a given case. **One of the nice features of the newer medications is that they are unlikely to cause death even when someone takes an overdose,** according to Dr. Caesar.

For more help, or literature and informative websites, please contact the Mental Health Center at 589-3671.

The main point I want parents to know is that clinical depression is a very treatable illness.

Understanding Childhood Depression

Early Identification and Treatment Key to Long-Term Health and Potential

Depression and other mental disorders affect one in five U.S. children and teens each year. To educate parents and communities on the reality of these

illnesses and the success of their treatments, the National Mental Health Association and other health

advocates across the nation will use May 3, Childhood Depression Awareness Day, to dispel stigma and encourage wellness among youth.

“Parents need to know the signs and symptoms of children’s mental health problems so that they can help children avoid the painful consequences of not getting help: poor self-esteem, school failure, substance abuse and even suicide,” said Michael Faenza, MSSW, president and CEO of NMHA.

Over the past year, stigma has been growing around childhood mental disorders and their treatments. Misinformation about treatments, early intervention and prevention are causing many families to shy away from help. After the FDA’s call for “black box”

warnings on certain antidepressants for youth and a surge of legislation in states to ban mental health screening in schools, as well as dialogue between school personnel and parents about a child’s behavior, many families are confused and not sure what to do when their child may have a mental health problem.

To help families navigate the abundance of both accurate and misleading information on children’s mental health and treatments, NMHA developed a series of tips and fact sheets available at www.nmha.org.

“It is important to empower families with the right information,” said Faenza. “Without the right information, too many youth go without appropriate treatment, often leading to problems at home, school and with friends. And in the worst of circumstances, they can lead to run-ins with the law, school violence and even suicide.”

Childhood Depression Awareness Day was established in 1997 by a mother whose child experienced depression.

The National Mental Health Association is the country’s oldest and largest nonprofit organization addressing all aspects of mental

health and mental illness. With more than 340 affiliates nationwide, NMHA works to improve the mental health of all Americans through advocacy, education, research and service.

For more information locally, please call the San Luis Valley Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center at 589-3671.



“Parents need to know the signs and symptoms of children’s mental health problems so that they can help children avoid the painful consequences of not getting help: poor self-esteem, school failure, substance abuse and even suicide.”

--Michael Faenza, MSSW, president & CEO of NMHA

See related story by Dr. Gregory P. Caesar, Medical Director for SLV Mental Health Center on page 3

Depression is not a normal part of aging

A friend of mine noticed how sad her aging aunt was a few years ago. I shared with her that depression in elderly people is sometimes different from depression in other age groups. The following tips were helpful to my friend's family as they looked for ways to help their loved one. Maybe this guide will be helpful for anyone considering depression in an older person.

Depression is **not** a normal characteristic of aging.

■ Depression in the elderly is just as treatable as it is in any other age group, which is to say, highly treatable. Doctors usually recommend a combination of counseling and antidepressant medicine.

■ If antidepressants are used, **specific antidepressants** which have had a greater success in general for the elderly may be used as opposed to others recommended for younger populations. A **lower dosage** may be prescribed also for this person. *This approach is because an elderly person may have multiple medical conditions, as well as, a slower metabolism rate.*

■ All of the typical symptoms of major depression can affect older people who are depressed. These include

- √ **lowered energy level,**
- √ **increased fatigue,**
- √ **loss or gain of weight,**
- √ **problems sleeping,** and
- √ **decreased ability to concentrate or make decisions.**

(Physicians along with mental health professionals can help determine whether these symptoms are explainable by a medical condition, including dementia. Of course dementia and depression can co-exist; in many such cases, the depression can still be treated.)

■ An important symptom of depression is **loss of interest or pleasure in activities formerly enjoyed.**

■ Some symptoms of depression are hard to detect in an elderly person. For instance, "**sad affect,**" the feeling of being sad most of the time, may not be obvious, because an elderly person's facial expressions and statements may not reflect it. The same is true of feelings of **worthlessness,** inappropriate **feelings of guilt,** or **recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.**

■ Older people are **less likely** than younger ones to express or share suicidal thoughts. This does not mean they are less likely to have them, though elderly people, as a group, are more at risk for suicide than many other groups.

Talk with them

■ If you feel an elderly person, you know might be depressed and suicidal, **don't avoid talking** about it with them.

■ As with any other age group, **bringing up the concepts of depression or suicide will not cause the person to become more depressed or suicidal.** In actuality, it is quite helpful for the depressed individual to express difficult feelings.



*By Fran Koski, LCSW
Counselor, SLV Mental
Health Center*

For 24 hour help, call the San Luis Valley Mental Health Center's emergency services at 589-3671.

A national crisis number for suicide prevention is 1-800-784-2433.

Creative Tuesdays with Ellen

Other Programs

By Ellen Hanson,
Creative Educator,
New Beginnings

This is the day that we do things that **shake up** and **wake up** the right side of the brain. . . and **flings head long** into something **unfamiliar** and **uncharted** for pleasure and joy and **possibly problem solving**.

It's May and it's Mental Health Month. Sooooo, we want to introduce you to one aspect of New Beginnings which we [the staff] believe to be exciting and innovative. We call it **Creative Tuesdays!**

This is the day that we do things that shake up and wake up the right side of the brain--the creative side of the brain--the part that uses logic with creativity and flings head long into something unfamiliar and uncharted for pleasure and joy and possibly problem solving.

It's easy to get into a rut because living can be hectic and if one suffers with mental illness, it can be twice as daunting. **Creative Tuesdays** offers one opportunity weekly in which participants can experience processes that are different from what we know. The result can be that we enhance our lives, build self-esteem and experience the success of creation.

Chapter 11 in **Pathways to Recovery Work book** [a resource from a project of the University of Kansas, School of Social Welfare, and the Office of Mental Health Research & Training] focuses on creativity and how it can supercharge one's recovery. This supports our goal at New Beginnings of **Creative Tuesdays** ; to open up our minds and to enhance our life experiences by using creative energy.

We are hopeful that **Creative Tuesdays** will also be very healing and allow

us to balance our stressful lives with fun and interesting projects.

Creative pursuits not only expand the mind but can heal the heart and open pathways to a healthier life-style--one that includes beauty and joy as well as hard work and planning.

Since the start of **Creative Tuesdays**, we have used makeup as a painting medium, created collages with various materials and molded clay projects. We've also constructed dream catchers and studied the Native American tradition of the dream catcher.

We have also used more traditional tools such as pencils and colored pencils



along with markers. Future plans include Yoga, possibly dancing, mask making, relief work and a group assemblage.

We hope to include gardening and some small construction projects. Our goals at CT are about extending what you know and including what you may not know yet. We hope that you will join us for an exciting year! Call 589-3671 to get involved with New Beginnings.

Does Stress Have You Down?

You can't always control the amount of stress in your life, but you *can* control how you handle it.

- Eat Right
- Get regular sleep and exercise
- Limit alcohol and caffeine
- Get regular check-ups
- Stop smoking
- Take five when you need to
- Do an activity you enjoy
- Prioritize your workload
- Take one thing at a time
- Learn to say "no"
- Don't expect perfection
- Compromise
- Go easy on criticism
- Talk your problems out





Mental Health Offices

Alamosa

8745 Co. Rd. 9 S.
Alamosa, CO 81101
(719) 589-3671

Monte Vista

402 4th Avenue
Monte Vista, CO 81144
(719) 852-5186

La Jara

322 Walnut
La Jara, Co 81140
(719) 274-5154

San Luis

409 Trinchera
San Luis, CO 81152
(719) 672-0331

Center

260 Worth St.
Center, CO 81125
(719) 754-3927

Antonito

9th and Dahlia
Antonito, CO 81120
(719) 376-2511

Community Corrections

2017 Lava Lane
Alamosa, CO 81101
(719) 589-5134

**New Beginnings Wellness & Recovery
Center**

522 Alamosa
Alamosa, Co 81101
(719) 589-2676

Private Probation

915 Fourth Street
Alamosa, Co 81101
(719) 589-5527

Prevention and Intervention Programs

Prevention at the San Luis Valley Mental Health Center covers several areas including

- Mentoring -- children ages 8 -18 (programs in Conejos, Costilla and Alamosa counties)
- Intensive Mentoring (additional case management added) ,
- Adolescent Transition Services with or without mentoring
- Alternative to violence education
- Violence prevention groups (to address bullying and anger issues)
- Adolescent Anger Management and Adolescent Substance Abuse Groups
- Family strengthening groups/ parenting classes
- Suicide prevention training and youth activities
- Adventure-based youth programs in the summer
- Prevention Education Activities
- Stress management
- Drug and alcohol presentations
- Other presentations as requested

For more information about these programs, please call Clarissa Woodworth at 589-3671 or email her at clarissa@sylvmh.org

WOW! a
Kid
... be a
mentor.

Call
589-3671 to
apply to be
a **mentor**
and change
a kid's life
forever!



Project Suburban is part of the Mi Animo Prevention module "R.A.C.E." Reaching all Children Equally. It's an afterschool automotive program that matches adult and youth gear-heads.

www.weweb.us

Women's
Empowerment
website

Mental Health Matters is the community newsletter of the San Luis Valley Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center located at 8745 CR 9 South, Alamosa, CO 81101

Contact the editorial team at 587-6964.

Articles submitted for the newsletter will be reviewed and edited for content and appropriateness to the mission of the Mental Health Center.



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Medical Director

Our mission is to improve the quality of life for the citizens of the San Luis Valley.

To:

Services provided by SLV Mental Health Center

Mental Health Care

Counseling

Outpatient individual, group counseling & family therapy for children, adolescents, & adults.

Psychiatric Services

Psychiatric consultation for adults, adolescents, children, geriatric and developmentally disabled individuals. Ongoing medication management.

24-Hour Crisis Intervention

Evaluations for psychiatric hospitalization, crisis intervention and participation on school crisis teams.

Psychological Evaluation

Evaluations of intelligence and personality, children and adults.

School / Headstart Services

In-school services for individuals, groups, and families. Located in most school districts in the Valley.

Sexual and Physical Abuse Services

Individual and group therapy for victims of abuse, family members.

Substance Abuse Treatment

Outpatient Addiction Services

Providing individual addiction/substance abuse counseling. Also available: group therapy, intensive outpatient, Level I, Level II education & therapy, substance abuse evaluation. Sliding fee scale.

Special Programs

New Beginnings Wellness & Recovery Center

A consumer run program. Provides opportunities for socialization and vocational and pre-vocational skill development.

Domestic Violence Program

36 week certified treatment program which teaches anger management, positive communication skills & alternatives to violence.

Nursing Home Service

Nursing home eligibility screening & treatment for elderly.

ACT

Assertive Community Treatment for adults with mental illness who are also involved in the criminal justice system.

PATH Services

Practical assistance for persons with mental illness who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Transition Project

Services for youth ages 16-21 with severe emotional disturbances, including those with co-occurring substance abuse or developmental disabilities and their families

Adventure Program

Summer activities to challenge youth to develop group skills, self control and self esteem and involves family education.

Mi Animo Prevention & Mentoring

Prevention programming designed to increase resiliency and give youth meaningful, age-appropriate opportunities to interact with pro-social adults and community leaders, to contribute to the community, and to build young people's self-confidence, resources and skills they need to reach their potential.

Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)

Creates meaningful opportunities for activity and personal growth for individuals fifty-five years of age and older.

Volunteers participate in service to their community.

Community Outreach and Education

Consumer, Child and Family Advocacy

Help with obtaining services, advocacy, outreach and education for the community

Women's Empowerment

Provides group and training in self empowerment.

Parenting Classes

Classes to teach positive skills & child development concepts to parents of children.

Consultant/Education Services

Trainers in the areas of mental health, addictions, substance abuse, and suicide prevention.