

# Concerned residents speak out on mental illness

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

An outgoing and extroverted youth, Bill Hayes had just completed four years as an honors student at Birmingham Brother Rice when his life — and that of his family — was turned upside down.

"We knew he had problems. We didn't know what to do," said his father, Bill Hayes Sr., talking about the summer after his son's graduation. "Then, one evening, he attempted suicide."

Bill Jr. had a promising life ahead, first as a student at U-M where he had been accepted that fall, then with a future full of hopes and dreams. At 19, he developed a chemical imbalance in the brain which can strike anyone, any time, at any age. We call it mental illness, and Bill's father is just one of many people coming forward to help release the stigma attached to all types of mental illness in society.

He spoke this month at a seminar on mental illness at the Adat Shalom synagogue in Farmington Hills attended by about 60 people.

"We think it's indeed a tragedy for a life like Bill's to end as it has," said

Bill Hayes Sr., a member of the Oakland County Alliance for the Mentally Ill, which he said has helped to support his family throughout his son's illness. "He was a brilliant student. He had the potential for a full and fruitful life."

Today, Bill Jr. is being treated at the Clinton Valley Hospital in Pontiac where he has resided for the past 14 months. He has been in and out of many different hospitals 15 times in the past 12 years, his father said.

ANOTHER OAKLAND County parent, Theima Abel, said she and her family have lived with the mental illness of her son for 25 years. At the time, Marty was a National Merit Scholar, Phi Beta Kappa graduate and had an "unusual potential for a normal life. We thought he would be a light in the world," said his mother. He attended U-M, where the illness

struck while he was a freshman.

"He had the classic symptoms," she said. "He couldn't concentrate, he kept complaining."

"Just imagine continual grieving for a child who has not died. My husband and I are still grieving. You have to give up all your hopes and dreams for that child."

Today, her 43-year-old son lives independently in an apartment. She said his sense of humor, and their, have helped the family through the tough times. "I'm laughing," she said. "If I don't laugh I'll cry a lot."

These parents, and others who spoke at the Farmington Hills seminar, said they are hurt and angered by stereotypical attitudes toward their children and others who have developed an illness over which they have no control.

People with mental illnesses "are not recognized as human beings,"

Abel added.

"These illnesses can destroy the spirit, as well as the body, if they are ignored," said Claire Griffin-Francis, keynote speaker at the seminar and head of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. "These are illnesses the same way diabetes is and illness

... or cancer is an illness."

TOM HOWELL, son of the president of the Oakland County Alliance for the Mentally Ill, has manic depressive illness.

If there were 15 million people in this country with any other type of

disease, "we would rise up," he said. "Well, there is such a disease of the mind."

"Depression is more commonly disabling than diabetes ... or other diseases. Many are unable to work, get out of bed or take care of personal hygiene without medication."

## Some information on mental illness:

Mental illness categorizes a group of disorders, which current medical research shows are problems with the brain's neurotransmitters and are biochemical imbalances.

Although there is no known cause, heredity, stress, or even recreational drugs may contribute, according to most current information.

People with a variety of mental illnesses are usually treated with medication, which can often keep

their disease under control.

SOME TYPES of mental illness include:

- schizophrenia — one of the most serious and disabling, it affects one in 100 people. It's onset is usually in the late teens or early 20s, and symptoms can include confusing language, poor reasoning, hallucinations and delusions and withdrawal from others.
- affective disorders — less disa-

bling than schizophrenia, most of these include mood swings — as in manic depressive illness — or persistent severe depression. About six percent of the population suffers from such a disorder and these are a major cause of suicide.

• other illnesses — anxiety disorders, personality disorders, behavioral disorders and sometimes alcohol and drug abuse are diagnosed and treated as mental illnesses.

## County talent on display

There's talent in Oakland County — and you can view it.

Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission will present singers, actors, comedians and dancers in a Talent Extravaganza at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Mercy Center in Farmington Hills.

The talent show features winners of the Oakland County Senior Cabaret of Talent, and two open auditions will begin at 2 p.m.

Prizes will be awarded to individuals or groups in four categories, 15 and younger, 16 to 24, 25 to 55 and 55 and older.

Performances are limited to five minutes with up to five minutes allowed for set-up.

Tickets, \$1 each for children and seniors and \$2 each for adults, are available at the door.

The Mercy Center is on 11 Mile Road between Inkster and Middlebelt roads. Additional information is available at 858-0908.

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