

Rally for Timothy's Law...again...and again Will common sense prevail?

By Karen Padowicz, Director of Development

Pay now or pay later...that's what is really being decided. According to Belinda Bradley, Director of Support Services, untreated psychiatric and addiction issues must ultimately be faced. And, the longer the wait, the more complicated and expensive the solution. Timothy's Law could tip the focus to preventing full-blown problems through early treatment, but this common sense approach to problem-solving is not being supported by the majority of New York State Senators.

So why the four year uphill battle with the State Senate for Timothy's Law? The Assembly continues to vote for it, but repeated Senate votes end in defeat and creation of a diluted version where insurance coverage separates psychiatric and substance abuse disorders—ignoring the fact that substance abuse and psychiatric conditions occur together at least 50% of the time. This modified bill is touted by the majority of Senators as “the right bill” to end insurance discrimination while protecting small business.

Stigma is at the crux of this issue—stigma and a strong small business alliance lobbying against decreasing any of their profits with higher insurance costs. Certainly, it is a valid concern, but perhaps it is also misplaced frustration in the complicated and expensive task of running a business in this State.

Think of the film *Network* when people leaned from city windows yelling, “I'm tired and I just can't take it any more!” The business position might be more about overall high costs and cumbersome bureaucratic regulations that gobble up time and profits rather than adding less than \$2.00 per month per employee for insurance parity. The shame of the matter is that fighting against Timothy's Law is like beating yourself up and wondering who assaulted you.

Statistics reveal that the states who passed some form of insurance parity have not seen the issues businesses are afraid of - runaway expenses and employees flocking to the mental health system. In fact, the changes are more subtle, but extremely positive for the people truly in need of equal coverage for psychiatric and substance abuse treatment.

Even Texas passed a comparable Timothy's Law. Large corporations and the legislator's own insurance policies include parity. The assumption is they all recognize the value of this coverage which often translates into prevention of larger problems, a reduction in lost employee hours and, in the bigger national picture, less cost to society (and individuals).

So, why is it New York Senators fail to see this? Advocates think it is primarily about small business rather than common sense. According to Assemblyman Paul Tonko, one of the most vocal supporters, Assemblyman Alexander “Pete” Grannis, chair of the Assembly Insurance Committee, Assemblyman Peter Rivera, chair of the Mental Health, MRDD Committee, and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, too many people suffer from insufficient psychiatric and addiction health care, care with a history of cut backs, high co-pays and severely reduced treatment options. The phrase “penny wise and pound foolish” comes to mind.

One local woman told this reporter that her daughter incurred a \$14,000 debt because of a recent relapse from bi-polar disorder which required lengthy and costly hospitalization. Another woman's therapy ended when the twenty visits assigned by her insurance policy were used. She was told to wait until the new year. “But what happens from now until then?” she asked. “I can't pay my bills and go to counseling too.” She's hoping the three medications she is taking will help her cope until the new year, but if they don't she might require expensive in-hospital care.

More than 320 state organizations support Timothy's Law. On June 8th Tonko and Silver called on the Senate to pass the Law and agree to work on a compromise in Conference Committee following passage. Perhaps, as you read this, you will also have heard that this has happened. If so, bravo for our State representatives. If not, shame on our Senators for adding to the despair of many New Yorkers.

Psychiatric disorders do not discriminate; they can occur to anyone at any point when life's stresses interact with a person's ability to handle stress. One's level of tolerance is influenced, in part, by genetics. Fortunately, not everyone needs help, but for the people who do, it can mean the difference between life or death—a self-sufficient life or one riddled with failure. Having the option of treatment as defined by Timothy's Law could change the outcome for individuals and communities.

Celebrating Hope and Recovery

The last Tuesday in May is always a time for colleagues and friends to get together at the AMH event which includes awards, a silent auction of art from East Side Center, guest speaker and time to catch up with people in the field.

Particularly memorable were the tables filled with staff and friends from Behavioral Health of the Glens Falls Hospital. They had come to help **Dr. Susan McPhillips** celebrate receiving the AMH **Walter P. Reichert Award** for outstanding services to the community. Ingrid Aldous, an AMH youth case manager, helped present the award with recollections of consistent caring. "It didn't matter if a child hadn't been seen for months," she said, "Dr. McPhillips always remembered his or her name." McPhillips a psychiatrist for the Center for Children and Families in Glens Falls, received a standing ovation as she returned to her husband and three daughters attending the dinner.

Susan Balfour, president of the **Glens Falls Rotary** and owner of Balfour Realty, accepted the **Dorothea Dix Community Service Award** for an organization's support. The Rotary Foundation gave COFAMH close to \$10,000 to develop a mental health curriculum for students. Co-Chairperson Karen Padowicz remembers writing the grant with mixed emotions. "I knew we needed to do it, but I had grown a bit cynical because of the lack of understanding and support in the community so when the Rotary came through our spirits were reignited." The Rotary's mission is to promote peace and understanding through improving life in communities worldwide.

The appearance of **Dona Ann McAdams**, recipient of the Dix Award for an individual's effort, brought laughter and tears. She started photography classes at East Side Center. In spite of a professional history which includes national recognition and worldwide photo exhibitions, McAdams holds the mental health community closest to her heart, "Being recognized by this audience is cherished the most," she said. One of the first "Picturing Ourselves" students, Natalie Nugent, presented the Award. Nugent remains active in the program and credits McAdams for the voice she found and now expresses through her photography. McAdams obtained a grant from The Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation to bring the program to life.

As the event's special guest speaker, college professor **Wayne Fleming** ended the program by challenging stereotypes. "I don't own a restaurant or a nail business," said Korean-born Fleming. Instead he shared a few lessons from a life of hardship and the persistence needed to succeed. Fleming's book, *"Thrownaway, Abandoned, Forgotten"*, chronicles his journey and self-truths gathered along the way.

CEO REPORT

Progress – let's continue!AMH thanks the community

In June, The Post Star wrote a large front page article on Mental Health Insurance Parity. In May, there was a consecutive series of six front page articles describing the experiences of local family survivors of suicide and their remembrances of the loved ones they lost - a tragic event that's hidden in family closets yet occurs and impacts more people than we know.

A few short years ago these articles would not have been printed. Mental Health is the last stigmatized health issue in this country and this barrier will only change when "mental health issues are discussed on the same level as asthma or heart disease" as was so aptly stated by Dona Ann McAdams as she received the Dorothea Dix Award for her voluntary contributions to mental health at last month's Annual Dinner.

In 1909 NAMH was founded as the first organization to advocate for mental health. In 1948 WWAMH was founded locally as the Glens Falls Mental Hygiene Association for the same purpose. NAMI-NC, a voice of support for families, was founded in the 1980's and, in the early '90s, *Consumer Voices* was founded and became *Voices of the Heart* – the real voice of those directly affected by mental illness

It was almost 6 years ago when a Stigma Action Committee was formed from representatives of these groups—Glens Falls Hospital Behavioral Healthcare, Liberty House and others to become COFAMH. As a coalition this voluntary group has grown and created educational events and materials that benefit our community.

In addition to education and advocacy, health and mental health workers have recently voluntarily united to collaborate on truly integrating mental health into all health care. Our great appreciation goes out to the Adirondack Rural Health Network, Washington County Public Health, and others involved in this initiative.

We want to thank those who joined us to Celebrate Mental Health at our Annual dinner. We thank Dr. Susan McPhillips for all the work she does above and beyond what could be expected. We thank Dona Ann McAdams for sharing her incredible creativity and love with the members and purpose of East Side Center and we thank the Glens Falls Rotary Foundation for selecting mental health as a worthy cause.

Until mental health is viewed as any other physical health issue it will be stigmatized. Until mental health diagnoses are viewed as brain based disorders and treated as any other specialty of the health care system it will be stigmatized. Until services for supports are funded like any other healthcare support services there will be stigma.

We at the Association for Mental Health would like to not only thank the Post-Star for publishing articles relative to mental health, but we also commend them on tackling these difficult issues head-on and in a real, humanistic and professional manner.

Mental Health Parity is not about cost it is about discrimination and civil rights. Help us spread the word.

As I see it

As I See It is an opinion column. Readers are invited to submit articles.

The positive attributes of psychiatric disorders

by Irv West

Youth Detention Counselor, COFAMH, Llama Farmer

Mary Anne (names have been changed) is schizophrenic, and has a terminal illness. When a Hospice nurse visited, it was the psychiatric diagnosis that overrode her censorship mechanism, which, for most of us, decides what thoughts are best kept to ourselves, and which are safely verbalized. When she appeared in Mary Anne's doorway, the first words she heard from her patient were "you're fat, and it's really unhealthy." The words were spoken without malice.

Temple Bardin has a doctorate degree. She is the author of numerous books that, for many, have revolutionized the way they relate to animals. Her books have been on the bestseller list, and her speaking engagements are booked for the next four years. Dr. Bardin is autistic and, it is because animals think in the same way as autistic people, that the author has been able to have such a great impact on her field. Were she "normal," her books would be little more than another series on animal training. They are not; I've read them and they have done nothing less than revolutionize how I relate to my animals. Dr. Bardin says in her introduction, "you cannot help it if you are not autistic, but I can help teach you some of the skills."

Mary Anne speaks with the honesty and simplicity of a child; Temple Bardin utilizes the thought processes unique to her diagnosis, to teach those skills to others.

Those of us who work in the mental health professions, tend to view illness from the perspective of being all negative -- that is "below the norm." Yet in each of the scenarios above (both true accounts), there were qualities of honesty and openness, of insight and understanding, that bring us to a higher level of awareness. But only if we allow it.

Robert Brooks is a psychologist who talks of building on a patient's "islands of strength." For Mary Anne, it is a level of honesty few of us achieve. For Temple Bardin, it is a level of awareness that, prior to reading her books, I did not know existed. What are the islands of strength for the clients you serve? Perhaps you can find some embedded in the illness itself.

When community cares

by Karen Padowicz,

AMH Development Director, COFAMH

In a recent study by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) community-based care showed the greatest benefits to kids and community—less time in inpatient care settings,

fewer arrests, improvements in school performance—all helpful to a child’s future and future taxpayer costs. It’s not surprising that kids with or without serious mental health needs do better when their community cares.

SAMHSA defines a “system of care” in their 1992 initiative, “*Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services Program for Children and Their Families*”, as a coordinated network of community-based services and supports that work together, and in partnership with kids and families, to help a child succeed. Recognizing and building on strengths is the underlying program philosophy which is now active in 121 programs across the U.S and, presumably, will find its way to more communities.

Fortunately, strength-building is gaining broader-based credibility. Five years of study led the UCLA Department of Psychology School Mental Health Project to advocate nationwide for positive, strength building behavioral supports in schools. Not only for kids being treated for severe psychiatric disorders, but for all others wearing warning signs of troubled lives.

Community mental health resources are under funded, and therefore limited, so it seems most efficient to simultaneously work on proactive thinking—prevention and early intervention—in as many places as kids are found. Timothy’s Law and school environments that nurture kids and therefore learning, will add to this strength-building model.

What these studies suggest is what many of us learned as children. The moral of the story wasn’t about the little train that couldn’t, or about degrading the imagination of Harold and his purple crayon. Nor was it about the Beast being perpetually bullied for not fitting in

So, when is it that adults stop believing in kids and affix negative motives to their behaviors? How many times do older kids hear “If you weren’t so stupid or lazy or you’ll never amount to anything”? When does the moral turn ugly and predict failure?

Positive behavioral supports can keep the train from derailing. Knowing someone cares enough to really hear and see a person always makes a difference regardless of age. Kids are new at life—adults need to be mindful of what they’re teaching.

The Vision

Phase Two of the Maple Street Capital Campaign

Bert Weber at BOCES created the initial concept for the Landscaping & Garden project at 230 Maple Street. The above drawing is his idea for a mental health memorial fountain on the Orchard Street side of the building. The fountain will be on a millstone base recognizing the industrial history of the building. Water will flow over flames made of copper representing the hope and resiliency of the human spirit. AMH is grateful to Mr. Weber for donating his talent and inspiration to this project. BOCES Horticultural students will also move it to completion.

Our Gardeners Plant the Seeds of Change

Three years ago AMH held its first-ever Capital Campaign to help renovate the old box company building on Maple and Orchard Streets. The results, grandly successful for mental health, fell short of the \$300,000 goal, but provided the funding needed to prepare the building for its current programs and services.

Last year, Donna Hurley offered to help East Side Center created a community garden and the harvest was used to create healthy and fresh mid-day meals. This section of the complex is thriving, but now it’s time to bring beauty to the remaining property.

Plant the Seeds of Change

The final phase of the Campaign will provide benches, shade trees, color and beauty to augment the life inside. The plan will move in segments with the fountain memorial in the final stage if the full campaign goal is reached. If you can, please contribute once again to this project which offers a visual gift to everyone on the bike path. A contribution form is enclosed.

Gardener Levels of Support

Bounty	Over \$1,000
Soil	\$500 (to \$999)
Water	\$250 (to \$499)
Sun	\$100 (to \$249)
Seed	Under \$100

All contributors will be listed on the Wall of Distinction and in the Association’s newsletter, Parallax—a new line of sight

Perceptions in a teen world

COFAMH, the Coalition for the Advancement of Mental Health, was invited to two health fairs this May. In addition to the regular mental health handouts, we wanted to test our own premise and hear what kids believed was bothering them so we printed hundreds of questionnaires. We learned that teens (more girls than guys) will willingly communicate for a piece of chocolate. We also learned that they share similar stresses and use talking and physical activity as coping skills.

Stresses	Males	Females
Grades	113	190
Parents	135	224
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	71	124
Teachers	70	79
Friends	82	147
Drugs/Alcohol	35	40
Gossip/bullying	122	247
Others		

How I cope	Males	Females
Write in journal	25	84
Talk	83	187
Eat	60	111
Drink/drugs	22	31
Sleep/no sleep	83	123
Get Mad	62	105
Exercise/sports	116	140
Others	44	53

COFAMH also hung posters which posed the question, “*If I could be totally honest, I would tell my (parents, teachers, friends, other students)...*” Answers were written on a sticky pad and placed anywhere there was space. Some comments which illustrate why “Gossip/bullying” scored the highest for stress are below:

To Parents

Give me a break
Stop nagging
Stay off my back
Enough with the attitude
Calm down
Listen to me more
You're not fair
You need to respect me
Stop yelling
I need more support
Leave me alone
(This poster had the most comments)

To Friends

Don't tell me things about others
Be honest with me
Stop spreading rumors
Be nicer
I am a lesbian
Give me space
Stop talking behind my back
I need people

To Teachers

Back off!
Don't be in my business
You're not that smart
Treat us how you want to be treated
Stop nagging, nagging, nagging
Be nice!
Stop lecturing!

To Other Students

Stop bullying
Just be nice to everyone
You're not as cool as you think

Be respectful
Always be yourself
That they are cool
Get over it!
Stop being a prep!
(This poster had the fewest comments)

CHANGES

Lili Dobert, CSW-R

Promoted to Coordinator of Forensic Services at Caleo Counseling Services. Lili's additional responsibilities include interfacing with probation and parole, coordinating services and training clinicians. She will also continue to provide assessments, specialized forensic evaluations and therapy. Ms. Dobert recently talked about the Sexual Offender Treatment Program along with Caleo therapist Berta Lowenstein, CSW-R at the Saratoga Library.

Beth N. Bishop, LPN

Hired as case manager in the Youth Services Program. Ms. Bishop brings ten years of experience in pediatrics at the Glens Falls Hospital working as a licensed practical nurse. Beth also worked with children with psychiatric disorders and their families while employed at the Center for Children and Families. She is now attending Adirondack Community College with the goal of obtaining a degree in psychology.

Sharon Figler

Currently a student at ACC pursuing a degree in Human Services, Sharon now provides residential counseling to individuals in the Pearl Street Program. She also provides weekly rehabilitation for children at Prospect Child & Family Center. With a daughter who served in Iraq from January -November 2005, Sharon did extensive work with the troops and families. She is married with three additional step children.

Correction: The previous Parallax reported an incorrect last name for the new Community Mental Health nurse. Her correct name is Patricia Nunez. We apologize for this error and welcome Ms. Nunez.

Congratulations and thank you to

The Post-Star

for responsible journalism and excellent reporting in the recent series on suicide. By taking the road less traveled your powerfully written and perceptive stories reminded us that silence does not always imply peace. As a community, we need to listen to what's really being said.

New guide for dads part of series

The Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) today released a guide for child welfare workers to help fathers have a positive impact on their children's lives. "The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children" is the first guide for professionals that focuses specifically on how they can more effectively engage fathers whose children come to the attention of the child welfare system. "Fathers play a crucial role in the healthy development of their children," said HHS Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, Wade F. Horn, Ph.D. "This manual gives fathers practical advice about their responsibilities to their children as providers, protectors and mentors."

To view this manual, along with others in the User Manual Series, available from the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information, log on to: <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/profess/tools/usermanual.cfm>.