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### Supporting Mental Illness

According to local statistics, mental illness affects one in five persons in the territory. (DeJongh. Par1) Mental illness is a world-wide thing. Mental illness is defined simply as any disease of the mind. "It refers to a wide range of mental health conditions — disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior. Some common mental illnesses are depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and Schizophrenia."(Mayo Clinic, par1)

In our territory the mentally ill are not as fully supported as those in the states. In the states there are many hospitals which deal with only the mentally ill while in our territory we only have one hospital, the Roy Lester Schneider Hospital, which deals with everyone. In this hospital, we have a Behavioral-Health unit with only about 15-16 beds on the fifth floor and a long term care unit with only 22 beds. Whereas we only have a few beds in our hospital for the mentally ill, the states have many hospitals that specialize in the caring for the mentally ill. The problem doesn't solely lie in the lack of equipment but also in the lack of people for the services and the lack of buildings.

In the states there are many half-way houses in which the mentally ill can go to stay. In our community we don't have any of these but we do have a few that are similar such as Karen's house on St. Thomas run by Ms. Monaghan. The Division of Mental Health, Alcoholism, and

Drug Dependency Services are doing their best to support and treat those with mental illnesses. There are two different types of clinics in which the mentally ill can get treated called the out-patient clinic and the in-patient clinic. The Division of Mental Health is an out-patient clinic, which means a patient can come and get treated and must leave. The hospital is an in-patient clinic, which means that a patient can come and stay overnight to get the required treatment they need.

The main problem is that not many agencies know about the needs of the mentally ill. For example, when I went to Human Services to find out how our mentally ill are supported, they were unable to answer any of my questions. When I asked if there were any other businesses that could help me within the building they referred me to the Division of Mental Health. At this agency, I was able to interview James Smith, a psychologist that works there. One reason for why we can't fully support them that he mentioned was that, "Mental illness people refuse to get treatment...they have their rights."(Smith, Personal Interview.)

There are many possible solutions to the problem of supporting the mentally ill of our community. For example, constructing more treatment centers, building educational institutions, employing more people to work at the Department of Mental Health, and building half-way houses are all viable solutions. Additionally, the Legislature could create more laws to help families who have a family member who is mentally ill. One inexpensive way to support them is by "removing the stigma on those who are mentally ill."(Smith, Personal Interview.) This means that we should stop using negative terms towards those people who are mentally ill such as retarded, insane, special ed., and demented. We can also encourage those who have a mental illness to go and get treatment done. There are special programs, in which the mentally ill can take part in such as Special Education, and counseling every once a month or week. Medication

is also administered to the patient whether it's by tablets or injections. "Mental illness impairs a student's ability to learn. Adolescents whose mental illness is not treated rapidly and aggressively tend to fall further and further behind in school." (The Science of Mental Illness, par7)

When asked the question: "If someone came up to you and said that our district doesn't fully support mental illness people would you agree?" Mr. Smith answered, "Yes, we turn up our noses when we see them...we don't even respect them sometimes."(Personal interview) We need to come together as a community and learn how to respect those who are slightly different from us. Even though most of the mentally ill do not want our help, we need to try helping them. The smallest of things, such as stopping the negative comments, could make a big difference in someone's life. It would allow many people to have the courage to get treated if people would stop saying negative statements. "Words can hurt..."("The Science of Mental Illness", Figure8)

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### Mental Health Awareness Essay

Mental Health is a topic that many people like to avoid. Instead of veering from the issue, our community should be thinking of ways to help citizens affected by mental illnesses. Here in the Virgin Islands, we happen to have many people suffering from mental illness. Witnessing these citizens on the street, I always questioned how our government supports these individuals. I often wonder where they sleep and how do they get the medical help that they need.

Mental illness varies from patient to patient. It can be natal or due to substance use, among many other reasons that should be dealt with in their own way. Mental illness can be caused by depression, Schizophrenia (which is a brain disorder that can cause people to hear voices or it causes them not to make sense when they talk), Bulimia, Alzheimers, Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD, ADD), and anxiety.

In our community, we have the designated a portion of the fifth floor of Schneider Regional Medical Center to treat and hold patients with mental illness. There are also private psychologists who work with these individuals, but our community had to do more. Many of these people are out in the street without shelter or proper medical help. There are many things that we can do to help.

Some ideas for helping these individuals are: opening shelters so these people can have a place to sleep and eat, creating activities for them so that they can do something creative, or simply

make them feel that they are not different from us. Channeling their mind is a good way to help them feel good and not see themselves as strange. Soup kitchens and shelters make them feel more comfortable with their surroundings and can help them stay out of trouble.

For people with Bulimia, Alzheimers, depression, and anxiety, we as a community shouldn't tease or criticize these individuals. We should encourage them to get treatment and try to assure them that everything will be alright. If you know someone who has any of these disorders, you should tell them that they shouldn't feel ashamed and keep it to themselves. These individuals feel that they should keep it personal, but in order to receive the proper aid, they must tell someone or else it will worsen.

According to the 2010 Mental Health Services Block Grant, here in the Virgin Islands, a bulk of people suffering from mental illness are between the ages of 21 to 64, 75.18% of all mental patients locally. Believe it or not, only 2.44% are homeless or in shelters. 94.14% live in private homes.

Our community needs to come together and talk about what we should do to help these citizens struggling in the Virgin Islands. These ideas presented are just a small portion of what we could do for these individuals. There is so much that we could do to help these people feel accepted, instead of calling them "crazy people." I would like to see more activities being conducted for the betterment of patients suffering from mental illness of any kind and to better educate the public on how to respond to mental health issues.

In the United States and here in the Virgin Islands, there are non-profit organizations that support the mentally ill and their families. Such programs are Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholic Anonymous, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness –VI (NAMI-VI). These groups come

together but need more communal support. With these groups, we can help the mentally ill and their families.

I believe that our society has the capability of doing great things to help these individuals, but it takes everyone's cooperation to make it happen. Our community should conduct an annual Mental Health Awareness Month in which these activities will be enforced. With just a little work and some dedicated people, we can make a difference. We can make a change but again, we need everyone's help to make a big difference.

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### **Mental Illness Awareness is a Must**

Do we truly understand what mental illnesses are and how they truly affect the people around us every day? Mental illness is said to be a mental cause that can greatly affect someone's thinking, mood, behavior, and emotions. Mental disorders can affect anyone. Some serious well known mental cases are schizophrenia, major depression, bipolar disorder, panic disorder, borderline personality disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, eating disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. These are just some of the many mental illnesses people suffer with on a daily basis. While there are no cures to these mental illnesses, there is treatment that helps tremendously. "One in five people will experience a mental illness of some sort in his or her lifetime." (Lekashman, Dressler, RN, par. 2)

Many people suffer from mental illnesses in our community but are they truly getting the proper and right treatment to diminish their illness. I had the pleasure of emailing Ms. Sonia A. Aubrey. She works for the NAMI-VI which stands for the National Alliance on Mental Illness-Virgin Islands, Inc. a nonprofit organization. She provided me with information on just what her program does to serve our mentally ill. Ms. Aubrey said, "What we do is advocate, support on behalf of the mentally ill and educate family members as well as the community on these disorders. We have a support group that meet every 3rd Wednesday of the month for 1 1/2 hours, and two trained volunteers with the "lived experience" teach a Family to Family -12 week 2 1/2 hours-Education Program- twice yearly. This program is now listed on the National

Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices for family members and or significant others who take care of their family member with a mental disorder. The first week in October is recognized as Mental Illness Awareness Week and for the past seven years we have been sponsoring an award dinner honoring to mentally ill persons that are contributing to the community and two community members that enhance the lives of persons living with mental disorders.”

As you can see by the information she provided her organization is positively doing outstanding things for the mentally ill our community. But you have to step back and keep this question in your mind, “What more as a community can we do!?” As I continued to search for information and answers I had the pleasure of contacting a nurse, Ms. Burton, who actually takes cares of the mentally ill on St.Thomas at the Eldra Schulerbrandt Facility. The facility is long term psycho-treatment center. It provides around the clock nurses, counseling, treatment, housing, and various educational activities to enhance the mentally ill patients who reside Department of health, Territory Mental Health and Substance Abuse Agency, Division of mental health, Territory protection and Advocacy agency, and Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands. These are just some of the main programs and Agencies that service the Virgin Island ill community.

What more can be done!? It really strikes you-the question. What I think can be better done to support the mentally illnesses of our community is a lot more awareness and educating the community on the issue. Too many people are poorly educated about mental illnesses and how truly they affect people. I think the subject mental illness should be embedding into the school curriculum from a young age were the subject will be addressed and understood. Work places should have annual seminars addressing the issue. A local website should be created that

will provide information, personal testimonies and videos from people who are living through a mental illness. A resource section of the website should provide helpful contacts.

More awareness is needed in our community no doubt about that. October is said to be the month that we strongly advocate and broad cast mental illnesses. I feel it should be a year round awareness of the issue. More advertising and AD campaigns, from television to the radio, talk shows the list can go on but you get my idea. I truly feel for the mentally ill and how we stigmatize them on a daily. More can be done and will be done as a community we shall combat this pressing issue.

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