

District 13 Report/ April 29, 2008

From the Desk of Senator Dede Feldman

A periodic update of state, local and some national news

Dear Friends, Neighbors and Constituents,

Campaign Update

I've been walking the precincts and ringing the doorbells in Senate District 13, with some interesting feedback. The economy is now top of mind for most folks, with the war and even the national campaign secondary - although most voters are aghast at what Hillary and Obama are doing to the Dems chances in November. A hearty group of volunteers is walking with me on most weeknights and Saturday and Sundays at 2 p.m. Won't you join the fun? You have nothing to lose but a few pounds. Call Janie at 345-7612 or Helen at 610-9009.

And the partying goes on... Friday, May 2 from 5-7 p.m. some Democratic friends from the mid North Valley are sponsoring a fundraiser (\$25-50 suggested or whatever you can do) at the home of Bob Ruth and Judy Griego Ruth at 3092 Rio Grande Blvd., one half block south of Candelaria on the west side of the street. You can park along side streets. There will be music, food and fun. Drop by.

If you can't come, I still need your help. Here's what you can do:

- Volunteer (call Helen at 610-9009)
- Help Dede Walk (call Janie at 345-7612)
- Make a Donation at www.dedefeldman.com
- Put up a Yard Sign if you live in Senate District 13 (www.dedefeldman.com has a map of the district on the constituent page)

What the Stigma of Mental Illness Looks Like... One Constituent's Story

Here's a story from Desiree Woodland, whose young son committed suicide two years ago this week. She's turning this tragedy around by educating the public about mental illness and raising funds for a therapeutic farm called Casas de Vida Nueva. She's put together a walk team for the upcoming NAMI NM Walk May 3rd, (check in at 7 :00 a.m. in the parking lot of the Hoffmantown Baptist Church at 888 Harper, NE) and is looking for contributions and walkers. E-mail her at scrappy1231@earthlink.net or give her a call at 344-4343. Here's what she has to say...

What the Stigma of Mental Illness Looks Like

Unwittingly and unknowingly I perpetuated the stigma - I didn't know what mental illness was, what it looked like, much less thought about the people with it. I didn't know that mental illness is a real biological illness and it is not a choice. I didn't know that asking someone with severe depression to just get over it, get on with life; deal with it, was like asking someone with cancer to heal themselves. It was like leaving someone bleeding on the side of the street without calling an ambulance. I didn't know that clinical depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder are some of the mental illnesses for which the symptoms look like disoriented thinking, erratic behavior, or emotional problems - but in reality are biological illnesses that require medical treatment.

I have learned that there is a continuum along which mental illness occurs. Levels of illness range from mild to severe. Depression is one of the most common. But it is more than sadness, which we all experience from time to time. It is a deeper, lingering inability of the brain to release the chemicals that allow human beings to process the stresses of life. At any place along this continuum, treatment could help ameliorate the symptoms. But, because of the stigma that exists most people don't want to admit that they are ill. Truthfully, who would want to, when it is seen as a weakness of character or constitution? Many people suffer in silence because they too believe the lie.

After my son's diagnosis two years ago of possible schizophrenia/delusional disorder I still didn't know. I thought that Ryan could just take a pill and somehow miraculously return to us as the full human being he had been before. I believed this was the cure - no more of this delusional thinking and arrested development. But for some people even the strongest antipsychotic cannot change the brain and make it work better. Medications have improved and do make a significant difference for most people. But, even when medications work, complications can occur if the person stops taking them, sending them into psychosis once again. For Ryan, his healing was not to be on this earth. My precious son, 24 years old, never gave his family or himself the time to learn about mental illness, with the chance of learning acceptance because he took his own life only nine months after being diagnosed.

A new paradigm is needed through which to view mental illness. As a society we need education because we believe the lie - we don't understand the biological nature of this illness. The majority of people who have a family member with mental illness or are afflicted themselves, suffer and struggle in silence, not feeling the support of society at large. In the media we often hear only the stories of people with mental illness who commit violence. The reality is that the percentage of persons with a mental illness who commit violence is no greater than those without it. We judge and make assumptions about people who are depressed as lazy or making excuses. We must educate ourselves - organizations like NAMI are making a difference. We must stop stigma whenever we hear people referring to persons with mental illness as crazy, schizophrenic, or manic depressive. These are people with who have an illness - they are NOT the illness. We must speak up when jokes are made, or we ourselves refer to our own lapse of memory as losing our mind or craziness. These metaphors continue to perpetuate the stigma. We must remember the seriousness of someone who must struggle against his or her broken brain and rely on medication to make a difference in his or her lives. Quoting Marja

Bergen, the author of a book on mental illness recovery called *Riding the Rollercoaster*, “We have come to believe, along with society, that our disorder reflects our personality. We should remember that such ideas result from the stigma society has wrongfully attached to mental illness. There is no relationship between our illness and our self-worth.”

This illness is something lived with day in and day out - perhaps year in and year out unless the illness goes into remission, which can and does happen as with other biological illnesses. Let us not forget the determination and perseverance it takes to learn to live with mental illness and the acceptance that must take place in the individual and their family before treatment can really begin. I am working with a therapeutic farm called Casas de Vida Nueva whose mission is to help those learning to cope with, understand, and live with a mental illness. The farm will offer fresh air, open space and natural beauty. This therapeutic environment will enable people to focus on recovery through psychiatric services, forming community, and building practical skills through meaningful work on the farm. For more information see the website: www.cvnfarm.org

Mental illness affects all people, from all walks of life. It afflicts without regard to socioeconomic status, race or gender. So, it is up to each of us to lead the way in reducing the stigma that is attached to the diagnosis of a mental illness. It is up to us to educate ourselves, our families and friends about exactly what mental illness is - that it is treatable and that it is an illness like any other. Ryan would have benefited so much from the opportunity to live on the farm, learning to live with mental illness, and maybe also learning how to rediscover his potential.

Desiree Woodland
Mother of Ryan who died May 1, 2006

Respectfully,

Dede

Senator Dede Feldman
New Mexico State Senate District 13
1821 Meadow View Dr., NW
Albuquerque, NM 87104
Tel/Fax: 505.243.1997
dedefeld@comcast.net

Web site link: <http://www.dedefeldman.com>
Blog link: <http://senatorfeldman.typepad.com>