

FOCUS ON CHILDREN



About Transformation: A Youth's Perspective

By: Matt Mikolic

Matt Mikolic is eighteen years old and will graduate this spring from Willoughby-Eastlake High School. He was invited by the Ohio Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, to share his views on transformation which are reflected in the following article.

About Money

Money shouldn't be an object... you should be able to get the care that you need no matter what. And children wouldn't lose their homes and parents to get treatment. My parents had to sell our home because they had so many loans against our house to pay for our family's medical care. That isn't right. People shouldn't have to sell their house to pay for medical care. These illnesses aren't our fault. We can't control them. We lost our house and we lost our privileges. There is never any money for kid things. No money to do things. All our money has to go to paying off debts. Why? This is a disease like any other.

In a transformed system we need to figure out new ways to pay for treatment. If the insurance companies and the government can pay for other illnesses, why can't they cover mental illness? A transformed system would recognize that kids are our future and without helping them get better, there won't be an economy to worry about.

About Suicide

There are deaths due to depression and mental illness. With the right treatment and support, people will want to stay alive. I spent nearly 10 years wishing I would die. I was so depressed. I didn't really want to be dead. I wanted to be out of my pain. If my mother did not do all the work she had done for me and the rest of my family, I would never be where I am today. She has helped me through good times and hard times. She has always been there for me. I know there are kids out there who don't have supportive families.

In a transformed system, we would find ways to help parents and families so they can be there for their kids. Parental support has got to be one of the biggest keys to helping kids avoid suicide.

About Education

I have been through a lot with my schooling. Teachers just don't understand these illnesses. They think that you are just choosing to be bad. I didn't want to be a bad kid. It was my reactions to things. I didn't have enough energy to handle things, and I would react badly. People acted as if I had a choice about this. Who would choose this? I am just trying to deal with what I have been given to the best of my ability.

In a transformed system we would provide education and training to every single teacher about these illnesses and how to help us. This is critical. The things they do with us in the classroom stress us out and make our illnesses worse. They don't mean to do it. They just don't know how to help us. In a transformed system we would have teachers

who understand us and can help us. They would know when to lay low and when to have us do more in school. We want to do well in school. We know that education is the basis for our future. All I want is to be well enough to be at school.

About Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)

ECT is a shock treatment to the brain. They put you under anesthesia, give you a muscle paralyzer, put electrodes on your brain and literally shock your brain. I had two series of ECT, 16 treatments each, when I was 14 and 15 years old. I had a very bad experience with it. With all the medications I was on, I had a weird reaction to the anesthetics, and since they give you muscles paralyzers, you can't exactly do anything. They gave me anesthesia, but I did not go under. This happened several times actually. Eventually I ended up going to sleep. But there were several times where I was not fully put under. I could hear everything they were doing, and I could specifically remember I was trying to move my fingers to tell them I was still awake but I couldn't do that because I was literally paralyzed. It was one of the worst things I have ever gone through... that feeling of being helpless. We found out later that there is an anesthesia monitor they could have used to be sure this didn't happen. They only had two in the hospital and so they didn't use one for ECT. It should be required that ECT be done using the brain wave monitor to make sure you are unconscious.

In a transformed system there would be mandatory requirements so stuff like that doesn't happen. I don't want anyone else to have to go through that.

About Treatment & Support

Therapists and staff think they can help. They've read a bunch of books and seen what is going on, but they haven't lived it. The fact of the matter is that professionals can't tell people what to do. They have to ask kids questions and then really listen to them. They need to realize that we know what the heck we are talking about. Anybody can say what they want to help someone. It is up to the person needing help when they want to take it to heart. It doesn't work unless the person is open to it. My advice to all family and friends... know that you are helping, but it is up to us in the end.

In a transformed system parents, friends and society would be important. Having friends is of the utmost importance, someone to share problems with. Then you don't have to analyze problems on your own. And they help to get your mind off things.