

Mental Illness and Your Town: 37 Ways for Communities to Help and Heal

Larry Hayes

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Reviewed by Carol Hoyer, PhD, for Reader Views (10/08)

Larry Hayes has finally taken mental illness out of the closet and set a blueprint into place that will help millions of families and individuals with mental illness get the help they need. From his own experiences, Mr. Hayes shares ways in which each of us can reduce the stigma of having a mental illness with excellent examples and ideas of how to set up programs/services to help regain dignity.

As Mr. Hayes states, throughout history treatment of, and regard for individuals with mental illness, has changed dramatically. The problem I see as I read this book is that many do not understand mental illness and many professionals, including medical staff, do not care to know. With today's medical and psychology businesses it is about herding people through the system as fast as they can. The problem is, with some types of mental illness you can't do that. Some individuals need long-term therapy, medication and community support.

His first chapter discusses how mental illness is not caused by mothers but mental illness can be fostered through things like postpartum depression, abuse, neglect and environment. He suggests that more professionals need to have better training in the area of mental illness to include medical, psychology, childcare workers and town administrators. It takes little time to set up these awareness training programs. One area that really sparked a fire in me was many children going into foster homes and the juvenile system are not given assessments to see if something might be causing their problems. Do their parents even get help?

Having grown up in, married to, and worked for the military, we are now seeing more and more soldiers return from war with post traumatic stress syndrome and our system is overloaded and those who need help are not getting it. Not to mention Vietnam Vets.

Each chapter is filled with examples of how our mentally ill are getting passed over, and what individuals and professionals can do to help--even from the smallest event, learn to know what resources are in your town--to writing grants and getting the government to provide more funding. There are many ideas given in each chapter on what you or I can do. Mr. Hayes has given excellent information on mental illness and enlightened everyone. He does it in a compassionate and sincere way. After reading this book, which I think is a must for everyone, it should spark a fire in you-- after all, one day it could be you or someone you love.

As a Psychology and Nursing instructor at two colleges, "Mental Illness and Your Town" by Larry Hayes is a must read and have for all my students.