

STATE OF OUR STATE:
ALLIANCE IN ACTION on the ROAD TO RECOVERY

By James Jones – Metropolitan Family Services.

This morning we are embarking on a trip to try to save stable and productive lives, at least in Illinois. Cutting the programs for mental health facilities in this state shows an apathy that could very well cause a travesty that could also prove tragic. We have seen on buses, on the streets, and even in programs for help, people with oftentimes severe mental disturbances that could be potentially dangerous. This is why this trip is so mandatory to many of us who need these programs just as much as any with a physical impairment. If someone had a broken arm or shattered ribs, you would want them to get medical attention immediately. But a broken psyche or shattered nerves, then what would you do? The answers to that do not come as easily because of the intricate workings of the mind. This is just one of the many reasons we must protest in numbers against the cuts to our communities, to stem the illnesses before they grow out of control.

Also, the stigma attached to mental illness is far greater than the physical could ever be. Derogatory terms for mental illness are plentiful, many use in everyday conversation. If the same would be said about someone in a wheelchair or crutches, it would be deemed cruel and distasteful. But mental illness, at whatever level it would be, is fair game for ridicule unless it is hushed up, swept under the rug, or in lower levels, ignored. These have not been effective methods to achieve mental wellness.

That is why this Road to Recovery to Springfield is so important; to have our voices heard. If no one speaks out there will be no attention or empowerment, and without these, there can be no recovery. We must stress the need for these programs clearly, distinctively, and in no uncertain terms. We have the right to stand firm and express that we cannot take this lying down. Remember that many would most likely be closer to stability had it not been for previous cuts; those many who could have lived productive lives and helped more clients in need by giving their stories as examples. We have gained great strides in the education and treatment of mental disturbance and far too much progress made to stagnate or regress. We will not slow down as we approach the finish line, or listen to nay-sayers who say we will not make it or try to cast us idly aside.

This is why it was so invigorating to be part of such a huge assemblance of different mental health services coming together for such a needed common cause, battling for the soul of Illinois. Not only did we experience unity in numbers but truth in numbers, which is one of the most powerful strengths of all, giving us a renewal of spirit in case the foibles of red tape leave us frustrated and downtrodden.

It is also ironic that I felt a sense of mass therapy with so many groups converging on Springfield showing that we care enough to come to the heart of the state to let our feelings be heard, if not heeded. It is a gamble if our showing will make a difference. Perhaps they'll go on as far as making a token gesture as the hoi polloi of Illinois, the talking heads in tailored suits, may. Or as W. C Fields said: "a lot of washed necks here today." Whether or not the "washed necks" actually do anything legislatively, they can't say they didn't hear our voices loud and clear. That the funding for our facilities cannot be sliced to the bone, they cannot ignore that we made a bold statement in the state capitol. We pitched straight, now it's up to them to catch.