



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO



SHARP Mesa Vista
Hospital

NEWS RELEASE

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“BREAKING THE CHAINS” OF STIGMA People Encouraged to Seek Help for Mental Disorders

San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) officials, the Meeting Place, Inc., and community partners and mental health consumers broke more than 8,000 paper chain links, representing the inhumane treatment people with a mental illness used to receive and the stigma that still exists.

The “Breaking the Chains” event is one of many activities taking place throughout the County during May, which is designated as Mental Health Month across the nation.

“The fear of rejection and discrimination prevents people with a mental illness from getting access to needed mental health services,” Nick Macchione, Director of HHSA, told the crowd gathered outside the County Administration Center. “This demonstration here is a clear example of the great progress we’ve made in eliminating the stigma of mental illness.”

Until the late 1700s, people with a mental illness were commonly restrained with chains. In 1797, French physician Philippe Pinel, the father of modern psychiatry, insisted that patients under his care be unchained and given more humane treatment.

Event organizers decided to break the chains—created by members of mental health clubhouses throughout the county—to shatter the negative image of people suffering from a mental disorder.

“We are here as a community to break the chain of stigma and make a statement,” said Sharron Hedenkamp, Executive Director of The Meeting Place, Inc., which spearheaded the mental health anti-stigma demonstration. “The stigma of mental illness should end.”

One out of every five Americans is diagnosed with a mental disorder every year. A mental illness is a disease that causes mild to severe disturbances in thought and/or behavior, resulting in an inability to cope with life’s ordinary demands and routines.

About 57,000 children, adults, and older adults benefit from HHSA mental health services each year. It is estimated that as many as 80 percent of people suffering from a mental disorder can lead productive lives if they receive appropriate treatment.

People suffering from a mental illness can access services by calling the County’s 24-hour, multi-lingual Access and Crisis Line at (800) 479-3339.

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