

# Do the Math!

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Do the arithmetic! One in five people suffer from some form of mental illness. Doug Ford, with NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness) Centre recent asked attendees to count every five people during the April breakfast meeting of the Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce.

“Caclulate Alabama,” said Ford. “That is 970,000 Alabamians facing mental illness. They face it every day.

“One of the pillars of NAMI, of course is advocacy,” said Ford.

“In Alabama, with all the budget crises we have had over the last several years, there are vulnerable people who get left out,” said Ford. “They get thrown away in my mind. They just get left out along the line. Our personal experience and most of you know the story of the stigma.”

Using what he has learn in NAMI’s Family to Family course, Ford illustrated what can happen.

“Family to Family discusses various mental illnesses we are faced with,” said Ford.

“The worst case scenario is paranoid shcizophrenia but there are other mentall illnesses and they are all taught.”

“Let’s say your daughter is bipolar and non-compliant,” said Ford. “Her life is spiraling out of control and she loses one day. She goes to CED Mental Health Center and drives her car in the front door. That is a serious act so she is put into jail. It is during the Christmas holidays. You can expect a long, drawn out process.”

“She doesn’t have any real income so she gets a public defender,” said Ford. “The court system now has hold of your purse and tells your daughter she has got to get through this thing somehow. It is like multi-layered.

Eventually what is going to happen, the Department of Mental Health is going to have go get involved in this. In Alabama we have three forensics examiners.”

Ford said they often plead not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect.

“When that plea is made that judge has to call on that psychiatrist to decide whether or not that daughter can stand trial,” said Ford.

If they say she is unable to stand trial, Ford said, they would hope to find her a bed at one of only two mentall hospitals in Alabama. One of these, Taylor Hardin, is for seriously mentally ill patients.

“That is your only hope so your daughter hopefully gets sent there rather than having to go to trial and face years in prison if convicted,” said Ford.

At this time, Alabama only has 115 beds in the state. The state is now down to two hospitals for mentally ill patients and at one time had seven hospitals.

“Bryce is one that at one time had 5600 beds, and it is now like 238,” said Ford.

“Part of that is because of medicine, therapy, You hope your daughter can then move to a group home and go through some rehab, structure, get her life under control so she can move back home.”

Ford encourages consumers to contact their legislative representatives.

And when speaking of representation, he said, “It doesn’t mean just go down there and sti in a chair, vote yea or nay, he is my representative. I call him and I thank Rep. Richard Lindsey for moving things. He made a couple of phone calls, they called us and things are moving now. Thank God for that.”

Alabama’s motto, Ford said, is “We Dare Defend Our Rights.

“Whose rights?” Ford asked. “I am telling you the most vulnerable people have rights and they are the ones that need organizations like NAMI. When people call me about our situation they say what can we do? I have taken the approach that you should write your Congressman. Alabama is in level funding. They are going to reduce it. But it is a reduction. That is 20 percent of the population that is mentally ill. As population increases, the population of mentally ill increases and there is another thing that goes on, inflation, so your level funding, what you provided last year, only goes so far this year.”

“I tell these people write your congressman, write your legislator, whether r it is down here in Alabama or your U.S. Congressman or U.S. Senator. There is a bill in Congress right now, Senate Bill 1945, the Mental Health Reform act of 2016. It is not a cure-all but it is a giant step in the right direction.You can contact somebody.”

“Write your legislator and support them with your money and with your time,” said Ford. “Get involved. Mental illness is amongst us. You see it on the news every day and it hangs out in Cherokee County Detention Center and it is hanging around out here on the streets. If we don’t do something about it, it will do something about us.”

“People who are mentally ill suffer every day,” said Ford. “Things are improving. Someone mentioned a while ago a new child psyche unit is opening in East Alabama which is associated with Bryce Hospital.”

Sue Guffey with NAMI Centre reminded those in attendance that NAMI meets the third Tuesday of every month at 6 p.m. at the ROC.

“We are trying to get people in Recovery and help them stay there,” said Guffey.



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DO THE MATH! Doug Ford with NAMI Centre shares some of the latest statistics on mental illness during the April breakfast meeting of the Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce. Ford urged those in attendance to write their congressman and senators urging them to support adequate funding for care of mentally ill patients.

“NAMI is a very worthy organization,” said Thereasa Hulgan, executive director, Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce. “Get a team together and go walk!”

During the program, Kay Davis, executive director, Cherokee County Family Resource Center, shared about the STAR (Saving Teens At Risk). Davis became director of STAR in August 2015.

“And yes, we do experience children with special needs,” said Davis. “t Judge Carver is the one that started this program. We are behind the old Middle school in the old band room.”

“I want you to know about us,” said Davis. “On April 28 we are having an open house from 11:30 a.m. until 1 p.m. There will be finger foods. I want you to come and see what we are doing as the STAR program.”

“Since I have been there we have had a 100 percent success rate with our students,” said Davis. “They are back in their schools, they have jobs and we are very excited about the STAR program.”.

“I taught kindergarten all my life, but this is a different age group I am really enjoying,” said Davis. “We have a full-time counselor, an instructor and me. Come by and see us April 28 from 11:30 a.m. until 1 p.m. behind the old middle school.”

Kathy Marko, director, Cherokee County Historical Museum, reminded attendees about upcoming events at the museum.

“I have been at the museum a year,” said Marko. “What an eventful year it was. But again, I have never experienced a community that comes together like this community. It comes together whether it is in need, joy participation or whatever.”

“As you know this is our 180 year celebration of Cherokee County,” said Marko. “We went ahead and did an ornament. We will probably do one for Christmas as well. It does have the county crest celebrating 180 years. We have 70 left, they are \$15 each. Come by and make sure you get one of these before they all get gone.”

On Thursday, April 28, the museum is hosting a craft class featuring Scott Key who works with driftwood, Marko said.

“There is always a lot going on,” said Marko.

The 70th Annual Meeting and Banquet of the Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce, Hulgan said, is this Thursday, April 21. Cherokee Industrial Development Authority will provide the entertainment.

“We have a lot of special people in our community,” said Hulgan. “We lost two recently, Hilda Moody and Dub Ellis. They are going to be inducted into the Alabama 4H Center Hall of Fame in Columbiana. That makes three for Cherokee County. Mary George Waite was the first one. It is a huge honor and for Cherokee county to have three it is just incredible.”

The Taste of Cherokee, sponsored by The Spirit of Cherokee, is Tuesday, May 3, at the ROC, Hulgan said.