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Mental Health Organization Celebrates 20th Anniversary

By Kevin Christensen



Bipolar Insights-Mental Health Educational Center has been assisting those with bipolar and mental health disorders, as well as the community, friends and family for 20 years.

Bipolar Insights-Mental Educational Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to aid and support people diagnosed with bipolar disorders and other mental health issues. It was established

in 1998 to assist those with the disorder, but to also educate families affected by mental health through a low-cost education center, supportive services, counseling, literature and seminars.

The organization was originally founded by James Witshner, of Pensacola, Fla., who suffered from the disorder himself. Witshner was looking to form an organization that brought people together with the common challenges associated with bipolar illness to support each other. Two weeks after he began the meetings for the small group, Witshner had a manic episode and left for a month. By the time he returned, Marcia Rose, 74, of Placerville, had assumed the position as the leader of the group. Witshner, now a resident of Pensacola, is on the board of directors and is currently heavily involved in meetings through online conference calls.

“I don’t have a mental illness, but I could see this group meant something to this small gathering of people. I wanted to keep it going when James left for the monthlong period,” Rose said. “I was not too educated in the area and soon after I sought an advisor. That’s when Dr. Ollie Mack got involved in the group. He has a lot of background in the mental health field and has been the advisor for Bipolar Insights-Mental Health Educational Center for 20 years.”

All of the employees that work at the center volunteer their time. One of the volunteers is Rose’s daughter Michelle Wimett, 50, of Placerville. Wimett has been on the board of directors for the center for 20 years when it began and is the treasurer for the organization.

“I have been involved since day one of this journey. My mother asked me to help at the beginning and I was happy to do so,” Wimett said. “It’s very rewarding to help a variety of people and as we continue to expand it becomes more rewarding to help people with different mental health issues get their lives back.”

Rose was born in upstate New York and moved to Placerville in 1998. She is officially retired, but does financial advising on the side and is the current director of the center.

“Only God could have put this entire thing together, I never thought my life would take me down this path,” Rose said. “I sold the performing arts studio and focused on the center because I could see the people there needed this and it meant something. After educating myself and getting an advisor, the best thing for people with bipolar disorder or a mental health issue is to educate themselves, get the right medications and understand a disorder like this does not define them and that it’s not who they are.”

Bipolar Insights-Mental Health Educational Center does fundraisers, gets funded at times by Marshall Hospital and also applies for grants they sometimes are approved for. The people who organize and run the center do so for the patients they serve.

“The classes are Monday nights and we do charge \$5 per class and that money goes back to things like paperwork or materials for the classes. We also do special seminars throughout the year,” Rose said. “Something unique about the center is we invite anyone to come including family members, friends and people in the community to educate themselves in general about mental health. We believe the more people who are not even affected by it personally can benefit the world as a whole if they understand it better.”

Rose said one of the hardest things is for people to make that first call and the next hardest thing is for people to walk through that door. There is still a stigma about mental health disorders and a lot of people with the illness have lost hope and believe they can’t ever be helped.

“One thing we do here is build these people up and make them realize they can live normal lives. Many come in without hope they can be saved. We give them hope first that if they come and learn they will improve and they won’t ever be alone,” Rose said. “These people have an illness like the body gets and it can be managed. I’ve seen marriages and relationships saved from what we do here. We challenge people here to prove others wrong when it comes to the stigmas associated with the disorders.”

Rose recently wrote a book that came out approximately three years ago called “Journey from Bondage to Freedom.” In the book she chronicles how Bipolar Insights-Mental Health Educational Center came about. It details the journey from when Witshner first started the group and how Rose took over soon after and beyond.

“I had friends tell me I should write a book about the entire thing because it really is a fascinating turn of events. I remember thinking I have no idea how to write a book and was staring at a blank computer screen,” Rose said. “I decided I should use some acting from my past and role play as a writer to get in the right frame of mind and then I was able to get going as a writer. It’s been a different path than I expected for my life, but it’s great to be here for now 20 years helping people.”

Mental health has been a growing topic of conversation nationally and locally. The number of attendees at Bipolar Insights has grown since its beginning. They do not prescribe medication at the center, but do educate people about prescriptions. 90 percent of those that attend Bipolar Insights meetings on a regular basis have maintained balance for several years. The organization is proud to serve the Sierra Foothills and beyond. Classes are Monday evenings from 7-8:30 p.m. at the Green Valley Community Church located at 3500 Missouri Flat Road, Suite 304, in Placerville. There is no pre-registration required.

To learn more about Bipolar Insights-Mental Health Educational center and to donate to their 20th Anniversary fundraiser, visit bipolarinsights.com/?page_id=1062 or call (530)-642-0859.

Marcia Rose is the founder and CEO of Bipolar Insights/Mental Health Educational Center. Marcia is the author of “Journey from Bondage to Freedom” – the story reveals her survival, as well as, her friendship with James, a man who has a bipolar disorder.

For information, Marcia can be reached at: trust@bipolarinsights.com. Weekly classes start at 7 p.m. on Mondays, Green Valley Community Church, 3500 Missouri Flat Road in Room 304 in Placerville. \$5 per person. Visit Bipolarinsights.com for details.

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