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LOCAL FAMILIES SHARE STORIES OF LIVING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS *The Shaken Tree* Gives a Glimpse of Despair, Survival, Hope

San Luis Obispo, CA, October 4, 2007 – In the often bustling chambers of the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors, time stood still for nearly 40 minutes last night.

Over 160 local family members, community leaders and volunteers – a crowd that required overflow seating in the lobby – shared a common story, remembering moments in their own lives spent with a loved one in distress. They witnessed the first screening of *The Shaken Tree: Families Living With Mental Illness*.

“*[The Shaken Tree]* brings the message home. It helped us all know what it’s like when a family member has a mental illness,” said James Patterson, San Luis Obispo County Supervisor, District 5. “I’m glad to know this film has been created, and I hope more people see it.”

“The stories in this film made me realize how painful mental illness is for the families,” said Neil Travis, Academy Award-Winning Film Editor (*Dances With Wolves*).

The U.S. Surgeon General reports that mental illness affects one in five Americans. Yet, the topic of mental illness remains rare^[1] in most conversations. Discrimination and stigma often extends to family members. The support so desperately needed – support that would otherwise be offered if a family member had a “normal” illness – isn’t always there.

“There’s a part of the Mental Health Services Act that’s set aside for stigma reduction – to educate the community and to provide hope. This film is our first step in that process,” said Karen Baylor, PhD., MFT, San Luis Obispo County Mental Health Director.

“Although we have scientific proof that mental illness is biological, there’s still a lot of misinformation that we are working to quell. We are proud to partner with the San Luis Obispo County Department of Behavioral Health and our other sponsors who have made *The Shaken Tree* possible,” said Jill Bolster-White, executive director of Transitions-Mental Health Association. “Our warmest thanks, however, go to the family members whose courage and honesty give us hope and remind us all that we’re not alone.”

TMHA’s Family Advocacy Program has teamed up with documentary filmmakers José Lemus and Mary Garcia-Lemus of Illumination Films to create *The Shaken Tree: Families Living with Mental Illness*. In a typically silent part of our culture, *The Shaken Tree* gives a voice to local

^[1] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General—Executive Summary*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, 1999. Online at: <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/summary.html>.

families, telling their stories of what life is like when a loved one has a chronic, persistent mental illness.

“There’s a lot of hope,” said Janice Holmes, Lead Family Advocate at TMHA. “There are a lot of families that live with mental illness and have very good lives.”

Holmes, with two family members who have mental illness, has spent seven years advocating for families’ rights and guiding them through the mental health and judicial systems. Her work as a family advocate at TMHA has benefited over 1,000 families similar to hers. As a result of her efforts and those of her team, local families have begun to tell their stories and educate their friends.

The Shaken Tree was screened privately on Wednesday, October 3 at 7 p.m. in the San Luis Obispo County Government Center, 1055 Monterey Street, San Luis Obispo. Following the screening, the documentary will be made widely available as a tool to aid other family advocacy and mental health organizations. By reaching out to communities with the truth about mental illness and its devastating impact on the family, TMHA hopes to educate the public, support those with mental illness and reduce the stigma for families as well as their loved ones.

ABOUT THE FAMILY ADVOCACY PROGRAM

For seven years, The Family Advocacy/Family Partner program at TMHA has offered confidential assistance and support, with dignity and respect, to over 1,000 local family members of those with a mental illness. With offices in San Luis Obispo, Santa Maria and Lompoc, advocates guide families through the mental health and judicial systems and connect them to other service providers. The program is a free service to residents in San Luis Obispo and Northern Santa Barbara Counties. Funded locally by the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), anyone with a family member or loved one who may have a mental illness can contact the program. No referral is necessary. For more information about the program call (805) 739-8681 or email familyadvocate@t-mha.org in Santa Barbara County or call Janice Holmes at (805) 541-5144, ext. 171 or email jholmes@t-mha.org in San Luis Obispo County.

ABOUT TMHA

Transitions-Mental Health Association is a non-profit organization that helps children and adults live, work and grow in our community. TMHA operates 19 programs at 34 locations that have provided over 29,000 contacts (one person attending one program) in the last year in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties. For more than 25 years, TMHA has been dedicated to providing housing, employment, case management and life-skills support to mentally ill adults, at-risk youth and homeless adults. For more information about TMHA, please visit www.t-mha.org.

For more information about San Luis Obispo County Department of Behavioral Health Services, please visit www.slocounty.ca.gov/health/mentalhealthservices.

Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) or Proposition 63

The Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) was enacted into law January 1, 2005. This followed the passage of Proposition 63 in November 2004, which proposed a 1 percent tax on adjusted annual income over \$1,000,000. This new stream of funding is dedicated to transforming the public mental health system and seeks to reduce the long-term adverse impact from untreated serious mental illness. For more information, visit www.dmh.cahwnet.gov/MHSA.

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