



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SLOtheStigma Campaign Revealed May is Mental Health Awareness Month

San Luis Obispo, CA – The SLOtheStigma Campaign has entered into a new phase: revealing the stigma referred to is about mental illness. First launched in early 2010, “SLO the Stigma” is a collaborative marketing effort between Transitions-Mental Health Association and 20/20 Creative Group, funded by the Mental Health Services Act (Proposition 63).

The new phase for 2011 includes a billboard design with a call to action and the image of a man out of the shadows. This billboard has been rotating throughout San Luis Obispo County and new advertisements have been seen in local publications.

SLOtheStigma is a mental health awareness and stigma reduction campaign, the first of its kind in San Luis Obispo County. The project has a robust online presence, a comprehensive list of resources for anyone in need, and a documentary featuring San Luis Obispo County residents describing their experience with mental illness. The campaign is designed to increase awareness of mental health issues, decrease the stigma of mental illness, and guide individuals who have a mental illness and their loved ones to local mental health resources.

SLO Hotline, a county-wide suicide prevention, mental health and emotional support phone line now directly affiliated with Transitions-MHA, is a significant partner in the campaign by providing confidential, bi-lingual, emotional support, suicide prevention and referrals to free and low-cost treatment. The warmth of a human voice can always be heard at the other end of the line on a 24/7 basis at 1-800-549-4499.

Jill Bolster-White, Executive Director of Transitions-MHA is pleased with the effectiveness of the “SLOtheStigma” campaign. “The campaign has raised awareness and more importantly, it has started conversations throughout the County about mental health. We hope this next phase permanently changes the way our community views mental health treatment and recovery from mental illness.” she explains.

Alec Ramsey, Creative Director and Co-owner of 20/20 Creative Group, was instrumental in designing this unique, time-released approach. "The SLOtheStigma campaign has a life of its own, and we wanted that life to mirror the transition that people who live with mental illness often go through. The beginning of the campaign was dark and hidden, representing the isolation and shame people feel when dealing with mental illness. This causes questioning and confusion for those around them, so the first phase of our campaign was meant to simulate those same feelings for the viewer. Once people reach out and seek help, they can find hope and the answers they are looking for. That's what this new phase of SLOtheStigma represents."

"This campaign has exceeded all of my expectations," explains Ramsey. "It's been so satisfying to see the impact, to see how much it has affected people. The true test is the viewing audience – when you see tears as feedback, you know you've succeeded," he mentions. "Where there has been apprehension for many to share stories before, this documentary lends them a voice. Professionals have also offered a great deal of praise and mentioned how urgently this message is needed in our community," Ramsey adds.

Amanda Nelson, one of the four participants in this documentary has had an amazing journey this past year. "Often, people who have seen me in commercials come up to me now on the street to share their own stories," she explains. "Sharing a big part of my life with others has helped raise my own comfort level, as well."

The funding from the Mental Health Services Act of the state of California will end in June 2011, although TMHA has no intention of ending SLOtheStigma. The agency will keep the website, Facebook and Twitter accounts active and continue to show the documentary throughout the community.

You can visit www.SLOtheStigma.org to watch the documentary and to find a list of locally-based, readily available support resources or call SLO Hotline at 800-549-4499 for support.

ABOUT T-MHA

Transitions-Mental Health Association is a non-profit organization that helps children and adults live, work and grow in our community. TMHA operates 27 programs at over 35 locations that reach over 2,000 people and 1,500 families in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties. The emphasis of TMHA's many services is to teach vital independent living skills, and build a framework for community re-entry through personal empowerment and hands on experience. For over 30 years, T-MHA has been dedicated to providing housing, employment, case management and life-skills support to teens and adults with mental illness; and support, resources and education for their loved ones. For more information, visit www.T-MHA.org.

ABOUT 2020

20|20 Creative Group is a brand marketing firm in San Luis Obispo. Through strategic brand positioning, brand identity design, online marketing, advertising and public relations, they help clients boost their profile, market share and profits. For more information, visit www.2020creativegroup.com or call 805-542-0707.

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Available for Comment:

- Jill Bolster-White, Executive Director of Transitions-Mental Health Association

- Alec Ramsey, Creative Director and Co-owner of 20/20 Creative Group
- Frank Warren, the Mental Health Services Act Division Manager with the County of San Luis Obispo's Behavioral Health Department
- Amanda Nelson, one of the four participants in the documentary