

# STATE & LOCAL

## Mental Health Crisis in NC

Gianna Tieri, Staff Writer

In July 2011, the U.S. Department of Justice found that North Carolina has violated the civil rights of 6,000 people with mental illnesses by failing to provide them with proper treatment. Dorothea Dix Hospital, once a pioneer in mental health research and treatment, has been shut down after 156 years. "Providing help to young adults with mental illness in North Carolina is at a crisis," says Meredith College sociology professor Dr. Lori Brown.

Chris Fitzsimon, executive director of N.C. Policy Watch, believes that the current predicament for people with mental illnesses comes from "the disastrous 2001 mental health reform scheme." Bob Geary, in an article for the Independent Weekly, writes that this reform package was supposed to employ newer methods of care, including "community-based programs, [and] modern psychiatric and psychotropic (drug) therapies."

Over ten years of budget cuts, political maneuvering, and poor

organization, the medical needs and civil rights of people with mental illnesses have plummeted down political priority lists. Although Dorothea Dix patients have been transferred to other facilities, they are often places without adequate plans or resources to provide quality care.

In July 2010, advocacy group Disability Rights of North Carolina filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice to help improve patient care. U.S. Assistant Attorney General Thomas Perez stated that many patients that could have been treated with out-patient care were "relegated indefinitely and unnecessarily to adult care homes because of systemic state actions and policies." Vicki Smith, executive director of Disability Rights NC, believes that "the state's bias towards institutionalization of people with mental illness has gone unchecked for far too long."

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (<http://www.nami.org/>)

defines mental illnesses as "medical conditions that disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others and daily functioning." An estimate by the National Institute of Mental Health reports that mental illness affects one in four adults each year or approximately 57.7 million Americans.

Mental illness can happen to anyone at any age. According to NAMI, "mental illness usually strikes individuals in the prime of their lives, often during adolescence and young adulthood." NAMI also points out that untreated mental illness has "staggering" consequences in our society, such as "unnecessary disability, unemployment, substance abuse, homelessness, inappropriate incarceration, suicide and wasted lives" and also observes that "the economic cost of untreated mental illness is more than 100 billion dollars each year in the United States."

Misperceptions about mental illness have created stereotypes and

social stigma. Suzanne Britt, assistant English professor at Meredith College, believes this "stigma arises from the notion that people who have comfortable lives are simply being hypochondriacs or whiners. Mental illness can lead to suicide, and suicide is a logical outcome of an illogical public perception." Britt believes that those with mental illness might be hesitant to discuss their disease because "having a cold or the flu is one thing. Hearing voices or being obsessive compulsive—those are quite another."

Meredith sociology professor Dr. Brown stresses the importance in our own campus community. She says that a Meredith College student in crisis, with or without health insurance, "could wait a day or two in an emergency room for a hospital bed and leave the hospital with prescriptions she can't afford to have filled." Our family members, friends, and classmates need more than our compassion—they need proper medical care.

## 26th Annual International Festival

Khatera Merkhel, Staff Writer

Raleigh celebrated its 26th annual International Festival featuring world music, food, and culture with the participation of over 50 different groups from around the globe. The first International Festival was held in October 1986 at the Raleigh Civic Center. 25 ethnicities participated, and the event became

a success that continues to be a favorite celebration of world culture in the Triangle.

The International Festival of Raleigh, now one of the main cultural and artistic offerings of the Triangle, provides a platform for multinational cultural groups and non-profits to make cultures ac-

cessible to each other through art, education, and community.

The three-day festival features traditional ethnic dances, authentic food, cultural exhibits, international bands and musical performances, and bazaars for arts and crafts from over 50 countries. The naturalization ceremony has been the grand opening for the festival since 1988, a tribute to the citizenship of 240 new Americans welcomed to Raleigh. Cultural exhibits provided information on the rich history and traditions of different cultures, while live performances and ethnic dances from over 30 different countries on the main stage also entertained festival-goers. Marzia Nawrozi, a junior at Meredith College and one of the participants of the event, loves "seeing people of different cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds with their families and children having a great time there and enjoying the offerings of the Festival. The International Festival proved to be a success in celebrating international diversity."

The increased number of food

booths and ethnic cooking demonstrations as well as dance and craft lessons and activities made this year's festival even more fun. Nawrozi added that, "The variety of food, games, arts and crafts, and colorful costumes were very exciting for the kids as well as adults."

Meredith College's Model United Nations Club, which has been participating in the festival for two years, was one of the participants this year as well. The MUN booth was staffed by several Meredith College students. Nawrozi added that "one of the main objectives of having the Meredith College MUN booth at the festival was to educate people about the U.N. and its mission as well as to encourage them to get people's signatures for Congress to persuade the U.S. to participate more in the U.N."

The celebration of the festival's 26th anniversary was another cause for celebration for the multicultural community of Raleigh with the participation of hundreds of people from varying cultural backgrounds.

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The staff of The Meredith Herald is committed to representing our diverse community by publicizing local events, by addressing controversy, by cultivating civic engagement and by empowering women.

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