

March for Dignity and Change in Mental Health

8/24/15

I'm Oryx Cohen, Acting Executive Director for the National Empowerment Center. I am not marching today for the dignity of a subset of the human population. I am marching for the dignity of all humanity.

When I was diagnosed it was one of the most traumatizing experiences I have ever had. I felt I was thrown out of the human race. I felt my dignity was stripped away, possibly forever.

It wasn't until I met amazing people like you all representing organizations like the National Empowerment Center, who asked about and validated my experience, that I began to feel my dignity being restored.

When I discovered the Hearing Voices Network in 2007, I finally felt I had come full circle and all parts of my humanity were validated, supported, and listened to. The altered states were no longer seen as a sign of illness, but as valuable, normal, human experiences that I and others could learn from.

What are we responding to when we hear voices, see visions, feel anxious, confused, depressed? We don't even ask that question, right. Instead, our society asks, what is wrong with you that you behave a certain way, have altered states. What is wrong with you?

Maybe if we started asking , what happened to you, we would discover there is nothing wrong with us! Maybe what is wrong is that we all have created a society where sexual abuse, neglect, and violence are common place. A society that is failing to care for its citizens on so many levels: whether it is inequality of wealth, corporate corruption, or corrupt politicians. A society that is rapidly destroying the planet.

By focusing on what is wrong with individuals , we forget to focus on healing community relationships. We forget about mother earth. We forget to create a society worth living in.

And this affects the dignity of all human beings, not just those of us who have been caught for being different or unable to conform.

So today, I march for the dignity of all humanity and dream of a day when all human beings are listened to and respected and those of us who have been told we are defective, different, outcasts, will be welcomed back as valued members of our human family.