

Ghost Asylums

When Families Become the System for Psychotic Disorders

Two **Colorado Mad Moms** will share their lived experience to highlight how gaps in Colorado's behavioral health system leave families functioning as de facto treatment providers for loved ones with psychotic spectrum disorders. Family homes become "ghost asylums," filling the void left by systemic failures in access to care.

1. Introduction

- Why family perspectives matter in behavioral health
- What we mean by "ghost asylums."

2. Understanding Severe Persistent Mental Illness (SPMI)

- Serious Mental Illness vs Severe Persistent Mental Illness
- What psychotic disorders actually look like "in the community."
- Common assumptions that are not usually true for this population
- How these assumptions impact care and outcomes

3. Grave Disability and Anosognosia

- What anosognosia is and what it looks like in the community
- Why models based on insight often do not work
- Grave disability and "least restrictive care" in practice
- The impact on families

4. Where the System Breaks Down

- The shift of responsibility from systems to families
- Gaps in accessing appropriate levels of care
- How these gaps lead to repeated crises, justice involvement, or loss of housing
- Emotional, financial, and safety impact on families
- Challenges related to information sharing (HIPAA)

5. What Could Be Done Differently

- What helped and what made things worse
- Ways providers can work more effectively with families
- Practical approaches within existing limits (including HIPAA)
- Where Colorado could move toward improvement

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WHAT CAN PROVIDERS DO?

- Invite caregiver input and listen to concerns
- Clarify what can be shared
- Recognize anosognosia as a barrier
- **Include families in planning**
- Document deterioration
- Plan beyond discharge and think long-term

A MORE EFFECTIVE SYSTEM

- Provide realistic pathways for impaired insight (anosognosia), and deteriorating conditions
- Allow access to appropriate levels of care with continuity across settings
- Institute long-term support options
- Support caregivers
- **Recognize families as part of the care team**

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- Fewer crises
- Less law enforcement involvement
- Lower cost
- Greater stability
- **Improved long-term outcomes**

WHO WE ARE

Presenter 1: **Kelly Comcowich** is a fierce advocate with lived experience caring for a child with severe mental illness. After losing her daughter to suicide precipitated in part by inadequate mental health systems in Colorado, she advocates to elevate family voices and promote compassionate systemic change. Contact info: kcomco@hotmail.com

Presenter 2: **Robin Predny**, LPCC, M.S., M.A., is a therapist and advocate with lived experience raising two young adult sons with psychosis-spectrum and bipolar disorders. As a member of Colorado Mad Moms, she bridges clinical expertise with a mother's perspective to champion stronger systems of care for families navigating severe mental illness. Contact info: rpredny@gmail.com

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