



Rwenshaun Miller

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Clifford W. Beers Award Committee
Mental Health America

Greetings,

My name is Rwenshaun Miller and I would like to be considered for Mental Health America's 2017 Clifford W. Beers Award. I am the founder and executive director of Eustress, Inc., a nonprofit built on the principles of raising mental health awareness through conversation and various activities to break the stigma associated with mental health and mental illness.

Mental health issues can affect all of us, directly or indirectly through a family member or friend. I learned this lesson the hard way when I was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder during my sophomore year of college. Ignorance, fear, and denial hindered my ability to get the help that I needed and almost resulted in the loss of my life. Eventually, I had to put my ego aside and seek the help that I needed. Like me, many people live in a state of ignorance, fear, and denial instead of seeking the help that they actually need.

My life changed when the gun didn't discharge when I pulled the trigger as the barrel touched my temple during this third attempt. I was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder 7 years prior and did not know how to handle it because I did not understand what it meant and didn't stick to the help that I was receiving which lead to self-medication with alcohol and multiple suicide attempts. So after that day, my passion has been to help people understand that it's okay to not be okay, and its okay to get help when it's needed. This led to a passion to raise awareness around mental health particularly in the black community.

My work with Eustress, Inc. is community-oriented and directly impacts individuals who may not have knowledge about mental health challenges. Since November 2014, I have engaged in community and online events through my talk series, "Let's Talk About It". Through Let's talk About it, I have delivered talks that have opened the discussion on various mental health awareness topics such as: mental health and relationships, Black mental health, minority women handling men with mental illness, [mental health awareness at Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#), and mental health for helping professionals. These engagements have allowed me to partner with various schools and organizations, including Mental Health America of the Central Carolinas.

The primary goal of the series is to break down the barriers to mental health awareness by helping individuals understand what mental health challenges are, how to seek help and provide support, and highlighting the fact that mental illness is not exclusive and can severely affect our community if it remains taboo and is under-discussed. Of equal importance, I strive to help individuals understand that even if diagnosed with a mental illness you can survive and lead a fulfilling life. This is especially important for my community and African American males who continuously suffer in silence.

In addition to this talk series, I conduct Mental Health First Aid trainings to teach members of the community how to be a first responder to someone living with a mental illness. The course teaches individuals how to recognize warning signs and what actions to implement until mental health professionals arrive.

In November 2015, I planned and executed the first annual ["Let's Talk About It Mental Health Awareness Walk"](#). The walk took place during the UNC Chapel Hill homecoming weekend and served as an opportunity for UNC undergraduate students and alumni to engage in service while simultaneously creating dialogue and awareness on the topic of college mental health. The success of this walk was unprecedented and has led to inaugural walks in Charlotte, NC and my hometown in Bertie County. Currently, Eustress hosts three annual walks (Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Bertie County) with over 500 participants in the past with our reach constantly increasing as we create spaces for people to feel comfortable talking about issues and learning ways to protect their mental health.

In addition to this, I hold a weekly conference call for men, Locker Room Talk. We discuss various things, including relationships, work, and whatever else, that can affect our mental health but we rarely discuss them in any other setting. I also started a men's yoga class with my friend, Danielle Terrell, to teach men how to do yoga and the benefits that it can have on your mental health. To be mentally healthy does not always include medication and/or therapy.

I recently completed my master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and awaiting my licensure as a Licensed Professional Counselor. I also dedicate time to the development of my blog, Rwenshaun.com, where I share some of my personal stories living with a mental illness in hopes of inspiring others to talk about mental health. Written from my first hand experiences, I put aside my fear of being judged, insecurities, and the perception of others to let people who may suffer from a mental illness know that they are not the only ones; that they are not alone. Through my blog, I help break the stigma and promote wellness for everyone.

It is honor to submit this nomination statement and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rwenshaun Miller