McLean Hospital Guest Blogger Scott L. Rauch, MD

I am pleased to introduce you to Deconstructing Stigma: A Change in Thought Can Change a Life. This public awareness campaign was developed by McLean Hospital in an effort to spark conversation not only about behavioral and mental health but also about the stigma that surrounds it.

While we always had great aspirations for this project, we could never have predicted how moving it would be—both for the hospital staff who devoted their time and expertise as well as for the featured volunteers who trusted us with telling their stories. Together, in a true partnership between McLean, our partner organizations, and the campaign participants, we created Deconstructing Stigma, and together, we are changing attitudes about behavioral and mental health conditions.

Shame and stigma are still far too prevalent when it comes to psychiatric disease. There should be no shame in having a mental illness, but the stigma that surrounds these conditions contributes to the fear and isolation that individuals and their families feel far too often. What we all must come to understand is that essentially every one of us is affected by mental illness in some way, whether by living with an illness ourselves or grappling with its consequences in a friend or loved one.

Told through a series of larger-than-life photographs of people who have been affected by psychiatric conditions, Deconstructing Stigma boldly challenges the misconceptions regarding mental illness. More than just statistics or nameless faces, the volunteers in this project are everyday people—just like you. Yet each one has been affected by mental illness, and each one has also faced stigma.

With an initial physical installation at Boston Logan Airport, a dedicated website, companion coffee table book, and regular blog posts on the Huffington Post by campaign participants, Deconstructing Stigma has the potential to reach several million people in 2017.

As you read the stories, we hope you will recognize the courage of every person as it shines through in their words and in their willingness to speak openly about some of the most personal aspects of their lives. We also hope that through their words, you will reconsider not only how you think about those who live with psychiatric conditions but also recognize that these issues affect us all.

We are proud of the work that has gone into this campaign and look forward to watching it grow and propagate nationally. Hence, we wish to express our boundless gratitude and admiration for each person who has participated in this project. Individually and in aggregate, they show the world that having a mental illness does not define the person and that everyday people can live productive, full, and highly consequential lives in recovery from these conditions. Thank you for helping us deconstruct stigma. Together, we are changing thoughts about mental illness, and together, we have the profound capacity to change lives.

Sources: Huffington Post