Having Panic Disorder and Getting First Job

For much of her adult life, Linda’s panic disorder was so bad that she couldn’t even shower or go to the market by herself—let alone hold down a job. But with therapy and help from Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services, the 33-year-old mother of two now has her first job ever doing merchandise recovery at a discount retail store.

“I never thought I would be able to have a job,” says Linda. “I was too worried about having a panic attack.”

Linda left school permanently in 5th grade to care for her mother, who had been diagnosed with advanced cancer. “We lived in an area where there was a shooting almost every day,” Linda says. “She thought it would be safer for me to stay home with her.”

The cancer spread to her mother’s lungs and brain and she died when Linda was 18. Within a couple of years, Linda was married and had her first child, a daughter. But after she and her husband separated, she started to experience panic attacks every time she left the house.

Recognizing an unmet need, Didi Hirsch developed Survivors of Suicide Attempt support groups in 2011. Headed by a licensed therapist and a peer co-facilitator, the groups meet for eight weeks and offer members a chance to talk about coping skills and strategies for keeping themselves safe.

Now listed on the Suicide Prevention Resource Center’s national registry for best practices, the groups have become a model for other agencies worldwide. Didi Hirsch has received more than 100 requests for information about the program and created a manual with recommendations for launching safe and effective support groups.

Ann, who participated in three groups before becoming a peer facilitator last year, hasn’t attempted suicide since she became involved in the Didi Hirsch program. “I still go through large bouts of depression where I’m feeling suicidal, but I have more support and coping tools than before,” Ann says. “I feel much safer now.”

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.

Helping Peers Struggling With Suicidal Thoughts

The first time Ann attempted suicide, a friend accused her of being selfish for putting her family through so much pain. She decided to keep her suicidal feelings to herself and ended up trying to kill herself several more times over the next five years.

“I felt very alone,” says Ann, whose first suicide attempt came after experiencing divorce and the deaths of both of her parents and a close friend in a two-year span. “I was embarrassed and ashamed of my actions. I avoided everyone and became extremely isolated.”

Ann found a life-saving outlet for hope when she joined a support group for people who have attempted suicide and had a safe and non-judgmental place to talk about her feelings and thoughts.

“People in the group have been there and understand what it feels like to be utterly hopeless,” says Ann, who never struggled with mental health issues until the series of losses that preceded her first suicide attempt. “Friends and family do not understand. They are scared and don’t know what to say.”

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If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.
Anyone who has ever been touched by mental illness knows how wrenching it can be for families. But imagine if you had no resources to cover your basic needs, let alone to find affordable mental health services. How would you cope if you were homeless, couldn’t get treatment for your traumatized child or were a housebound older adult?

Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services is dedicated to caring for the most vulnerable members of our community. The agency continually stretches to meet the growing needs of Los Angeles’ diverse communities with more and better services. But it cannot do this important work without a core of passionate and dedicated volunteers.

Didi Hirsch’s volunteers provide leadership, time and funds to ensure that children and adults in communities characterized by poverty or stigma have access to quality mental health services. Our Suicide Prevention Center’s Crisis Line can function 24/7 in English and Spanish because it has 200 trained volunteers who answer calls, chats and text from people thinking about suicide or worried about a loved one. Thanks to volunteers, Wellness Center clients participate in exercise, cooking and stress management groups to support their recovery and reintegration into the community.

Our voluntary Board of Directors, which provides Didi Hirsch with leadership and guidance on policy and initiatives, is comprised of generous benefactors who care deeply about the agency’s mission and offer their talents and financial resources to support it.

As Chair, I would like thank all of our extraordinary Board members and volunteers for helping Didi Hirsch transform lives. Because of your contributions, countless children and adults with mental illness can look forward to brighter futures filled with meaning, purpose and hope.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to our newest Board member, Pamela Klutz, and look forward to introducing additional Board members in the near future.

**Volunteers Make It Possible**

by Board Chair
Carlos Garcia

**Danny’s Legacy**

**Preventing Teen Suicide**

Susan Sobel received more than comfort and support from Didi Hirsch’s Survivors After Suicide bereavement groups after her teenaged son, Danny, died by suicide nine years ago.

“They kept me alive,” says Susan. “I don’t know how I would have made it through without them.”

Susan now shares her story at high schools throughout Southern California to help students understand the emotional repercussions of suicide. She also has set aside a portion of her will—what would have been Danny’s inheritance—to support Didi Hirsch programs that focus on preventing teen suicide.

“I want Didi Hirsch to continue the work it is doing to educate kids about suicide,” Susan says. “I’m confident in the quality of their work and don’t want programs to end due to lack of funding.”

To read Susan’s full story, go to http://didihirsch.giftplans.org. To learn more about making a planned gift to Didi Hirsch, call Mickie Faris, Vice President of Advancement, at 310-751-5425 or email her at mfaris@didihirsch.org.
Judd Apatow and Hundreds of Screaming Fans Raise Awareness and Funds

Movie producer, director and screenwriter Judd Apatow, best known for The Forty-Year-Old Virgin, Knocked Up and This is Forty, hosted and performed at a variety show at the Largo at the Coronet in Los Angeles in January that raised $20,000 for Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services. The show featured stand-up routines by comedians Kevin Nealon and Chris D’Elia and an acoustic performance by Fleetwood Mac guitarist Lindsey Buckingham. Apatow originally earmarked $10,000 to the agency, then agreed to donate an additional $5,000 that was matched by our newest Board member, Pamela Klueft. Crystal Li and Andrew Jay Cohen, dedicated supporters of Didi Hirsch’s Suicide Prevention Center, organized the event.

Eighth-grader Delila Brown had two reasons for organizing a high school concert this January: to raise money for teenaged girls struggling with depression and suicidal thoughts of suicide and to meet teenage pop star Jacob Whitesides. Delila, a student at Flintridge Preparatory School in La Cañada Flintridge, achieved both goals when she presented Didi Hirsch’s Suicide Prevention Center with a check for over $16,000. Also interested in preventing teen suicide, Whitesides, 17, and his mother, flew in from Tennessee for the concert. Whitesides played guitar and sang to an audience of about 250 fans—many of whom paid $100 to have their photo taken with him beforehand. Afterwards, he recorded a brief video clip urging teens to call the Suicide Prevention Crisis Line if they or someone they know is thinking about suicide.


Photos by Joey Reger
David Mills was homeless and ready to die when Adrian “Red” Roberts, a bus driver with a huge heart, dropped him at Didi Hirsch Sepulveda’s doorstep and urged him to get help. David was among four clients who shared their stories to show supporters how Didi Hirsch fulfills its mission to transform lives.

Several passionate champions of mental health awareness and suicide prevention were honored at the Awards on April 26, including singer/songwriter Mary Lambert, television personality Howie Mandel, NBA New Orleans Pelicans forward Ryan Anderson, former California Senate President pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg and his daughter, Jordana Steinberg, a college-aged mental health advocate.

Comedian Wendy Liebman emceed the event, which kicked off with Mary Lambert, our 2015 Mental Health Ambassador, singing her hit song, “Secrets.”

Liebman, Dear Abby and Los Angeles Times columnist Steve Lopez presented awards to the honorees. Anderson’s father, Jack, accepted the award for his son, whose team made the playoffs and was unable to attend. “If anyone who is listening needs help,” Jack said during his remarks, “remember you have a voice.”

About 530 guests attended the event, which raised close to $475,000 for Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services.

Blues artist The Reverend Shawn Amos, a member of Didi Hirsch’s Board of Directors and co-chair of the event, closed the festivities with a performance of original and classic blues.

“It’s impossible for stigma to survive when people so bravely and honestly claim their dignity and determination,” Amos said. “I see a day when people will stop talking about ‘having’ mental illness and instead celebrate how they are merely ‘living’ with it.”

Please save the date for our 20th Erasing the Stigma Leadership Awards on April 28, 2016.
NY Times Bestselling Author Shares Harrowing Experience

New York Times bestselling author Terri Cheney read from her moving and sometimes harrowing autobiography, Manic: A Memoir at a special reception hosted in November by Didi Hirsch Board member Laura Ornest and her husband, Rick Leslie. About 60 agency friends gathered for the event at Ornest and Leslie’s stunning architectural home in Santa Monica Canyon. Ornest, who is a contributing reporter for Classical KUSC radio, moderated an insightful discussion with Cheney about what it’s like to live with bipolar disorder.

Genius Grant Recipient Discusses Journey Through Madness

Esteemed legal scholar, mental health policy advocate and bestselling author Elyn R. Saks made a rare speaking appearance at Didi Hirsch’s Legacy Society luncheon at the Annenberg Community Beach House in Santa Monica in March. Saks, who received a MacArthur Foundation “genius grant” and a Didi Hirsch Erasing the Stigma Leadership Award in 2009, spoke with humor and compassion about living with schizophrenia and how society treats people with mental illness. Afterwards, Saks signed copies of her award-winning memoir, The Center Cannot Hold: My Journey Through Madness.

Board Member Hosts Reception for CEO and What Snakes Want

Didi Hirsch Board Member Janine Lichstein and her husband, Henry Lichstein, hosted a reception for Didi Hirsch President/CEO Dr. Kita S. Curry at their lovely, light-filled home in Santa Monica on June 7. An award-winning poet who publishes under the pen name Kita Shantiris, Dr. Curry read from her first full-length collection of poetry, What Snakes Want (Mayapple Press 2015), before answering questions from the audience. Afterwards, Dr. Curry signed copies of her book while guests admired the Lichstein’s inspiring works of art.
Kids Overcoming Trauma

Three sisters shared their joy and pride after successfully borrowing toys from the toy loan program at Didi Hirsch. Their faces beamed as they each received certificates of achievement and special “wish list” toys of their choice.

Evelyn, 8, received a new play kitchen; Jennifer, 5, got a “Hello Kitty” bicycle with training wheels; and Ashley, 2, was happy with her toy stroller and doll but preferred to cuddle her stuffed penguin.

The program operates like a library with a bonus. Child clients and their siblings earn points every time they return a checked-out toy in good condition. After 5, 10 and 15 weeks of satisfactory returns, toy borrowers receive small rewards. At 20, they receive a special wish list toy to keep.

“It works hand-in-hand with our therapeutic goals for the family, to learn how to communicate better and to have positive interactions,” says Wynne Alexander, program director of Didi Hirsch Inglewood’s Child and Family Services Division. Therapists also use the toys in their work with traumatized children. “Children aren’t able to sit and talk about their feelings,” says Program Coordinator Dr. Patrick Kelly. “Playing with toy cell phones, ambulances and police cars can help traumatized kids gain a sense of control over their world.”

Leading the Effort to Reduce California’s Deaths By Suicide

California’s crisis hotlines answer more than 250,000 calls a year from people thinking about or worried about someone with suicidal thoughts. Even with these resources, about 48,000 Californians attempt or die by suicide each year.

A Didi Hirsch-led project to increase collaboration among the state’s suicide prevention centers has created a system to collect critical information that enables crisis centers to identify trends, improve practices and become even more effective in addressing caller needs.

Fifteen crisis centers statewide participate in the Common Metrics project, which was funded by the California Mental Health Services Authority to create consistency in how crisis centers collect data.

In one 21-month period, crisis lines were asked how effective calls were in reducing distress. Nearly 85% of callers surveyed said the call was “Helpful” or “Very Helpful” and 87% said they’d be “Likely” or “Very Likely” to call again.

“The numbers tell an important story,” says Didi Hirsch’s Senior Vice President of Clinical Operations Lyn Morris. “They prove what we have believed—that crisis lines really do work; most people thinking about suicide feel better after talking to a counselor.”

The question about suicide risk was one of six categories of information that the crisis centers agreed to collect. Additional metrics include demographics, reason for call, call volume and follow-up information and caller satisfaction.

Suicide prevention experts nationwide have been reaching out to learn more about the project. Presentations were made at the American Association of Suicidology’s 2014 annual conference and at the 2015 Safe States Alliance. Since then, many suicide prevention centers nationwide have contacted Didi Hirsch for more information.

“Didi Hirsch’s Suicide Prevention Center has been a leader for many decades in developing tools and programs that help people in a crisis,” says Didi Hirsch President/CEO Dr. Kita S. Curry. “We are honored that the state put its faith in us to lead this effort. Putting systems like this in place will help save lives.”
For his community outreach project, Didi Hirsch psychology practicum student Jon Rugg led a support group for people with Parkinson’s disease.

He had personal reasons for wanting to work with the patients: his late father died from the disease.

“Because I was on active military duty, I was unable to be around for my dad the majority of the time he had Parkinson’s,” Jon said. “I didn’t fully understand what he was experiencing, especially his depression.”

Two years later, Jon was on a tour of duty in Afghanistan to become a psychologist. He entered Rosemead School of Psychology at Biola University and is pursuing a doctoral degree in clinical psychology.

As part of his training, he became a psychology practicum student at Didi Hirsch. He and MSW intern Jenna Rodman partnered on the outreach project which included presenting information to the group’s members about depression, coping skills and caregiver support.

“I wasn’t able to be there for my dad, but being available to the patients in the Parkinson’s support group was a meaningful way for me to give back to the community.”

The National Council of Behavioral Health, which represents more than 2,000 community mental health and addiction treatment organizations around the country, gave Didi Hirsch’s Military Families Are Resilient Program Director Erica Trejo its Rising Star Award in April. The prestigious award recognizes an individual with less than 10 years of experience in behavioral health who has demonstrated extraordinary leadership, courage and compassion in their advocacy efforts. Erica, who is a military wife and mother of two young children, championed the program, which provides treatment and support to families affected by the deployment of a parent or caregiver.

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**Didi Hirsch Newsletter**

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**Save the Date!**

Sunday, September 27, 2015
Didi Hirsch's Alive & Running 5K Walk/Run for Suicide Prevention
www.aliveandrunning.org

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**Mission Statement**
Didi Hirsch transforms lives by providing quality mental health and substance abuse services in communities where stigma or poverty limit access.