

HOUSTON ENDOWMENT

A PHILANTHROPY ENDOWED BY *Mr. and Mrs. Jesse H. Jones*

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An afternoon DBSA support group

HEALTH



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Approximately seven percent of the U.S. population suffers from depression, and antidepressants are among the most widely prescribed medications today. “Depression is different from ‘the blues,’” says **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance** (DBSA) executive director Glenn Urbach. “If someone feels worthless, hopeless, sad and fatigued for long periods of time, and they’re not able to concentrate, sleep or eat, most likely they have depression.” When euphoria, anxiety, rage, irritability, grandiose thoughts and racing ideas are mixed in, they are typically diagnosed with bipolar disorder. “Bipolar is depression plus mania, or two poles,” explains Urbach. “Whatever goes up must come down.”

Depression and bipolar disorder are not character or personality defects. “It is a physical illness of the brain,” says Urbach. “The brain is an organ like the heart or the lungs, and sometimes it doesn’t work the way it should. Depression and bipolar disorder show up in behavior, rather than in organ failure, so often there is an undeserved stigma attached to the illness. With appropriate treatment, depression and bipolar disorder are manageable diseases.” Appropriate treatment includes medication, therapy and support. “Support is where DBSA comes in,” says Urbach.

DBSA offers 64 support groups each week at 35 churches, community centers and neighborhood clinics. The groups meet at convenient times throughout the day. “We have a model that’s easily replicated,” says Urbach. “If someone will provide a space with chairs in a circle, we can provide everything else.” Trained facilitators help participants share experiences and information with each other. They learn coping skills, find out about doctors, treatments and options, and discover they are not alone or unacceptable because they have depression or bipolar disorder. The groups combat isolation and help participants avoid suicide, divorce, incarceration, homelessness, drug addiction, job loss and abuse. A vast majority of participants have reported that the quality of their lives and their recovery improved because of the groups.

“DBSA has support groups all over greater Houston, from Pearland to Pasadena, so we have the area covered geographically,” says Urbach. “Now we’re focusing on unique populations prone to depression, like seniors, veterans, adolescents, single moms and substance abusers. We also provide help to family and friends. DBSA is the one-stop shop for people to go to get their lives back on track.” He adds, “Through our groups we want to help people manage their illnesses, live better lives and remember how to take the time to smell the roses.”