

Mind & Body Connection

Lunder Family Alliance: A Parent's Story

As the ocean fog gently rolled in and a hush fell over the crowd, Susan Stover took the microphone and began to tell her story to nearly 200 friends and family at the annual Signs of Hope fundraiser. To say she was animated and passionate would be an understatement. She described the heartbreak of growing up with a brother who suffered from schizophrenia and her disappointment after learning her middle child had inherited a similar illness. "I had read if I married someone without mental illness in his family, the odds were only 10% that we would have a child with the illness," Stover shared. "So when my middle child began having symptoms I was very worried."



Susan Stover addresses guests at Signs of Hope. Photo by Margaret Logan

It was when her son decided to take a gap year to travel abroad and did not contact her for several weeks that her worry escalated. When she finally got word, it was from an official at Heathrow airport. "They said he wasn't doing anything wrong but that he was acting strange." She sent him a ticket to come home and received another call from Logan airport. At that point he agreed to go the hospital in Boston. "It was the longest drive of my life (from Yarmouth to Boston). I was so upset and angry but railed against our fate – I was NOT going to go through this again!"

But she did.

Upon his release and subsequent return to Maine he had difficulty keeping a job, finding the right medications and staying on them. Hope for the family came in the form of The Lunder Family Alliance at Spring Harbor Hospital.

Part of the program includes the Purdy Family Navigator, a critical position that connects with families from the time their loved one is admitted. "Introduction to the hospital system can be so traumatic to family members," said CEO

Stephen Merz, FACHE. "It's difficult for both the patient who is dealing with a disruption to their work or education, and to anxious family members who are unsure about how to best support their loved one."

The Purdy Family Navigator was incredibly helpful to Stover's family. She met the navigator in April when her son was admitted. "I was so discouraged but she called me regularly, even after he left the hospital." Shortly after discharge, her son decided to stop taking his medication. "That's when the rubber hit the road. We had a big family meeting and the navigator was there with his clinicians." During the meeting Stover was adamant and was insistent with her son that the medication treatment was best for him. "The next day she called and told me 'I rocked' but I couldn't have done it without her."

The LFA, made possible by a generous \$1,000,000 challenge grant, was designed with a goal to improve services for young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 admitted to Spring Harbor Hospital. In addition to family support, the program focuses on employment and educational opportunities and vocational training for these young patients.

This year's Signs of Hope was held at the home of Melissa and Matthew Rubel in Cumberland Foreside and raised over \$190,000 for the LFA. Please contact Development Director Michelle Zichella at 207/661-6101 or zichem@MaineBehavioralHealthcare.org if you would like to support this amazing program that brings together so many important components to recovery.

"I just love Spring Harbor Hospital and I am a firm believer in staying connected to loved ones with mental illness."