



M-POWER.ORG

Nothing About Us Without Us

July 26, 2016

Scott Allen
Spotlight Team Editor
Boston Globe
135 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02123

Mr. Allen,

At 3:00 PM this Monday, August 1st, we—a coalition of advocacy groups fearful that the civil liberties we have fought for over the past 50 years are being undercut by the Spotlight team's reckless disregard for facts—will stand outside your door with a simple demand: Instead of portraying us through the faces of 116 murderers, portray us as we really are. We know that pictures are far more compelling than facts. So show our pictures, since you seem determined to ignore the facts.

We will bring the names and faces of some 500 individuals who have been the victims, not perpetrators, of violence. Let your readers see these faces. Let them feel our pain. The facts are clear. People like us who have been confined to psychiatric institutions are six times more likely than the general population to be murdered.ⁱ Show your readers the faces of those of us who have been murdered. People like us who have received intensive mental health services are eleven times more likely than the general population to be victims of violent crimes.ⁱⁱ Show your readers our faces. Tell our stories, all our stories, not just the few that portray us as violent criminals.

You have deceived your readers into believing that we are over-represented among murderers. You have exploited confusion about what "mental illness" means. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention asserted in a 2011 report: "an estimated 25% of adults in the United States reported having a mental illness".ⁱⁱⁱ If the CDC is correct, the Globe's finding that only 10% of murders in Massachusetts were committed by someone with a mental illness is strikingly low, 15% below the expected number. Based on these data alone, mental illness must actually decrease the likelihood of committing murder, not increase it as the Spotlight series would have us believe.

The truth is that there is no consensus on what "mental illness" really means. Is mental illness something 25% of us have (as the Centers for Disease Control claims) or is it something that only 3.3% of us with "severe" symptoms have (as the Treatment Advocacy Center claims). Behind all these statistics, who are we? What are our stories? What have we achieved? Who will tell the truth about our lives? You claim that the 116 murderers whose faces were featured in the Globe have this ill-defined illness, but you rely on your readers' imaginations to fill in what this actually means. Then you add a few horrific stories to further stir up their most dreadful imagining.

The Spotlight is extraordinarily vague in describing what qualifies a murderer to be included in your line up. Instead of providing facts, you play upon your readers' stereotypes. In the public imagination, murderers must be mad or black or brown or foreign or somehow other than the "Great America" of the 1950s (or is it the 1850s?). Donald Trump uses this to his advantage in describing undocumented workers: "We have drug dealers coming across, we have rapists, we have killers, we have murderers." However, the Spotlight team did not rush out to find a lineup of undocumented murderers in order to evoke fear and loathing of all 11 million undocumented workers in America. So why has the Spotlight team been so willing to do this with mental illness?

Our guess is that you can see the contribution undocumented workers are making to this country but you fail to see the contributions we are making; you see us as a burden, not a blessing; as a problem you want to fix, not a resource that is part of the solution. If you saw our contributions, you would be reporting them. So, sit down with us. Hear our stories. Learn about our contributions. Write about all that we have to offer. Show our pictures, not as violent murderers or even as victims of violence, but as valued members of this Commonwealth. That is all we ask. Give us a call. Send us an email. Set up an appointment so we can talk before August 1st at 3:00 PM.

Justin Brown

Ruthie Poole

M-Power.org

617-442-4117

cc: Brian McGrory, Globe Editor

ⁱⁱ Hiroeh et al, The Lancet, Vol 238, Dec. 22/29, 2001, *Death by Homicide, Suicide and Other Unnatural Causes in People with Mental Illness: A Population-Based Study*.

ⁱⁱ Teplin et al, Archive of General Psychiatry. 2005 August; 62(8): 911–921, *Crime Victimization in Adults with Severe Mental Illness: Comparison with the National Crime Victimization Survey*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report Supplement Vol. 60, September 2, 2011, page 1, *Mental Illness Surveillance Among Adults in the United States*.