

SMI Caregiver Academy Non-Profit (501c3)

Mission

The mission of the SMI Caregiver Academy (SMICA) is to train SMI Caregivers (spouses, parents, grandparents, siblings) of Loved Ones who have a No-Fault Brain Illness (SMIs: Bipolar, schizoaffective, or schizophrenia). SMICA is a family-run non-profit started by Michael Uram, 20+ year caregiver.

My Caregiver Biography

*Michael Uram, Chief Education Officer
SMI Caregiver Academy*

My name is Michael.

I am a Dad, a husband, a sibling (one of six), and a very blessed fellow. If you were to look up the phrase "Brain Neurological Disorder" in an illustrated version of the DSM-5, you might see pictures of my extended family.

Extended family members struggling with:

- Schizoaffective Disorder
- Paranoid Schizophrenia
- Clinical Depression
- Schizophrenia
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- BiPolar I
- Bipolar II
- PTSD
- CPTSD
- Substance Overdose (suicide)

Then ... successive generations with more of the same.

As with most people, I had no clue about brain neurochemistry illnesses. No clue that emotions are neurochemical. No clue that we don't:

- see with our eyes
- don't hear with our ears
- don't taste with our tongues
- don't feel with our touch
- don't smell with our nose

We do all of these with our brain. Eyes, ears, nose, skin, and tongue are just "input portals" where we accept data from our environment. How we interpret this data and experience our inner and outer lives - happens in our brain.

Having been raised by incredibly loving parents who instilled in us solid values and a strong moral core, I had NO CLUE that:

- brain chemistry could completely "swamp" our learned sense of "right" and "wrong" / "moral" or "immoral" / "fair" or "unjust".
- brain chemistry could so fundamentally alter one's perception of "reality".
- such a deep well of anger and rage could arise from solely internal sources.

NO CLUE.

Until in psychosis, there was a stolen car ... and "secret directives" nestled in radio broadcasts ... and "private messages" in license plates ... and imagined offspring ... and holes punched in the walls ... and doors kicked out of door frames ... and unintelligible words spoken at hypersonic speed ... and cowering in a fetal position, consumed by darkness, for days on end ... and ... and ... and ...

NO CLUE.

Some told me I was "imagining things". Neighbors whispered, "bad parenting". Some medical office staff said that -I- needed psychiatric care. Some doctors told me to "shut up and give 'em these pills". My favorite was "Dr. Harvard Disease" who dismissed my questions with "I got my medical degree at Harvard. Where did you get yours?"

They too, had ... NO CLUE.

Things began to get better with better doctors and a solid diagnosis. 100+ titrations of meds (and counting). Non-stop reading, NAMI's Family to Family class; in-person classes with Dr. Xavier Amador; bringing into conscious awareness my core values and triggers; improving my Emotional Intelligence; carefully listening non-judgmentally to my Loved Ones and learning effective Caregiving Practices - all of these were key ingredients to helping me understand and develop empathy for my Loved Ones.

I am a blessed fellow because I have had an extraordinary opportunity to learn:

- to become more patient
- to be a better listener and observer
- to stop thinking that it's "about me"
- to be less quick to judge
- to be more supportive
- to be a better Dad, husband, and partner
- to research more, to seek greater understanding
- avoid jumping to preconceived conclusions
- the value and importance of grieving
- to focus less on "remembering the future"
- to accept my life as it is -now-
- to be grateful for the privilege of watching my Loved Ones grow
- that limits & boundaries are -essential- to growth & recovery
- that when "broken", we must put our brokenness to work helping others
- to have hope for better days
- that each of us can "do hard things"
- that life is a -long- journey that passes quickly.

Do kindnesses.

Close your eyes and listen with your soul.

Find joy.