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PEOPLE

## The art of getting through

By Paul E. Kandarian | January 17, 2008

Mental disorders can leave sufferers in a fog; life is seen through a fuzzy prism and people may feel no ability to adequately express themselves.

"When we try to find ways to deal with it," said Christopher Wood Robbins of Whitman, who in April was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, an autistic condition, "our way of getting our messages across more often than not takes the form of art."

"Dancing Through Fog: Living Under the Specters of Mental Disorder and Mental Illness," coordinated by Robbins through "Arts from the Heart," a local art collaborative, has been scheduled for Jan. 26 at the Middleborough Public Library from 1 to 3 p.m. The event will provide a venue for artists or their family members who struggle with a mental illness or condition. The public is invited to bring poems, music, brief stories, or monologues for an open mike session at the beginning of the program.

"I wanted to host this event to raise awareness of mental disorders," Robbins said. "Even though we like to think of ourselves as enlightened and progressive, we as a society still harbor a few prejudices toward anything that is different. When we see someone acting a certain way, we cannot see the part of him that just wants to be loved and accepted, but lacks the right instructions or has a chemical imbalance that inhibits him from functioning the way he wants."

Also coordinating the event is Louise Dery-Wells, a local psychotherapist, who said Robbins "is a very good poet who wants people to know that those with mental disorders are quite capable of using the arts to communicate. Some very well-known artists with disorders were Ernest Hemingway, Virginia Woolf, Hans Christian Andersen, Jackson Pollack, Vincent Van Gogh"....

The event is free but donations will be accepted, half of which will go to the Friends of the Middleborough Public Library.

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(Michael Mack featured alongside poets Nancy Brady Cunningham and Nancy Morgan Boucher.)