



Mike Veny, of Astoria, has been diagnosed with anxiety issues, depression.

PHOTO BY JOHNNY MILANO

## HELP LINES

**LI CRISIS CENTER**  
516-679-1111; confidential help line, 24 hours, every day

**MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF NASSAU COUNTY**  
516-504-HELP;  
9 a.m.-6 p.m., every day

## REFERRALS ON MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**NASSAU COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH OFFICE**  
516-227-7057

**MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION IN SUFFOLK COUNTY INC.**  
631-226-3900

**SUFFOLK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES**  
631-853-8500

sociation said, and about 5 percent of psychologists, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2011 data.

Mike Veny, a professional drummer and mental health speaker who grew up in Hempstead, said he had mixed experiences with therapists. Veny, 33, who now lives in Astoria, has been diagnosed with depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety and anger issues.

To be effective, therapists need to be plugged into their patients' day-to-day reality. "You need to go hang out and eat in the neighborhood regularly . . . to get it," Veny said.

Mental health organizations reach out to churches and religious groups to help bridge the divide.

"Churches are seeing mental health as an illness, and seeking mental health therapy is not an alternative to your spirituality," said the Rev. Nellie Taylor-Walthrust, a minister at Westbury Gospel Tabernacle and director of The Leeds Place, an outpatient mental health and chemical dependency clinic in Westbury.

## No more shame

Removing shame is key to greater acceptance, said Bassey Ikpi, writer and founder of The Siwe Project, a nonprofit dedicated to reducing stigma about mental health care in the Washington, D.C., area.

Founded last year, the organization launched a "No Shame Day" campaign in July during National Minority Mental Health Month. About 90,000 participants shared personal stories of mental health battles or experiences with family members via social media.

"It told me that people want to talk about it," said Ikpi, 36, of Lanham, Md. "People don't want to be ashamed and closed off."

Veny said he stopped taking medication when he was 15, because he didn't feel like himself and the drug's controlling effects hurt his music. But Ikpi and Rahim each took several years to find a combination of medications that work best for them.

"Life doesn't end with your mental illness . . . that's not your total story," said Rahim, who graduated from Harvard and received a master's degree from Columbia University's Teachers College. "You have a mental illness, but you're not *the* mental illness."

# A RACIAL GAP for African-Americans

cal Dependency and Developmental Disabilities Services.

The office has overseen a program for about three years within Nassau University Medical Center health clinics in Hempstead, Elmont and New Cassel in which a family advocate educates clients on mental health services, he said. In 2010, the Division of Community Mental Hygiene within Suffolk's Department of Health Services began conducting standardized depression screenings across its primary-care health center network, the division's director, Arthur Flescher, said in a statement.

But Colleen Merlo, director of the Mental Health Association in Suffolk County Inc., said: "A lot of physicians are fearful of doing depression screenings because there

aren't enough resources. One of the things they say is . . . if someone screens positive, where do they send them?"

## Therapy cost prohibitive

Desravines said she called a three-page list of therapists recommended by Stony Brook Health Outreach and Medical Education, a student-run free clinic. Almost every office said the price for uninsured clients ranged from \$1,500 to \$2,000 for the first session, and \$600 to \$800 for each additional one, she said.

"I was like, 'I can't even afford that. That's more than my rent,'" Desravines said.

Experts say African-Americans are more likely to put off seeking treatment for mental health needs until they've reached a crisis point.

Hakeem Rahim, 31, of Hemp-

stead, was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2000, his sophomore year as a psychology student at Harvard University, after he was rushed to the emergency room. He said he spent two weeks in a psychiatric ward. Looking back, he sees what must have been signs of his illness. During a manic episode, he said, he began to hallucinate, believing he saw Jesus and could do stunts from "The Matrix."

"I thought I was fully functional, but the main thing — at one point, I felt like I lost control of my mind," Rahim said.

Another barrier African-Americans report is finding a therapist who is aware of cultural nuances. African-Americans represented about 4.9 percent of psychiatrists across the country in 2010, the American Psychiatric As-

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## CLARIFICATIONS

In a Dec. 23 story on charitable giving, a paraphrase of comments by Diana Aviv, president and chief executive of Independent Sector, stated that some donors were upset over nonprofits' involvement in the tax debate. A spokeswoman from Independent Sector clarified that Aviv was referring to potential increases in income tax rates.

## THIS DATE IN HISTORY

**1890** The Wounded Knee massacre took place in South Dakota as an estimated 300 Sioux Indians were killed by U.S. troops sent to disarm them.

**1916** Grigory Rasputin, the so-called "Mad Monk" who'd wielded great influence with Czar Nicholas II, was killed by a group of Russian noblemen in St. Petersburg.

**1972** Eastern Air Lines Flight 401, a Lockheed L-1011 Tristar, crashed into the Florida Everglades near Miami International Airport, killing 101 of the 176 people aboard. (Investigators determined that the crew was distracted by a burned-out indicator light, and failed to notice that the autopilot had become disengaged, sending the plane into a slow descent leading to the late-night crash.)

**1975** A bomb exploded in the main terminal of New York's LaGuardia Airport, killing 11 people.