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CaIMHSA Program Partner Spotlight

Entertainment Industries Council, Inc.

Partnering with Media and the Entertainment Industry

Movie characters, television storylines, and news reports have the potential to reach directly into our homes and to connect audiences of millions with powerful stories, images and experiences. By engaging the professionals who create entertainment and report the news in developing accurate and balanced portrayals of mental illness and offering hope for recovery, the Entertainment Industries Council's (EIC) partnership with CaIMHSA has a powerful reach for stigma and discrimination reduction.

Behind the glamorous image of Hollywood and the mystique of large news operations is an established network of professionals who generate the characters we love, write the stories that stir our emotions, and determine what makes the "news" we see in print, hear on the radio, watch on television, or view online. With deep roots in the news and entertainment industries, EIC engages industry professionals in collaborative partnerships that help journalists and creative professionals do their jobs to produce realistic, compelling, accurate stories while harnessing the power of these industries to change social norms for the better.

EIC, a non-profit organization, was founded in 1983 by leaders of the entertainment industry to bring the power of the industry to bear on communication about health and social issues. The organization is considered to be the chief pioneer of entertainment advocacy outreach and one of the premiere success stories in the field of entertainment education and information resources for entertainment creators, through innovative and time-proven services and methods of "encouraging the art of making a difference" from within the entertainment industry.

Resources for Entertainment Industry Partners

EIC is a resource for writers, producers and actors looking to portray mental health challenges in an authentic way. EIC's *First Draft* program connects entertainment and news industry professionals with experts who can help improve depictions of characters and storylines to add authenticity to productions that improves both level of audience engagement and entertainment value. In addition to facts about mental illness and mental health, EIC can recommend changes in tone and communication for more accurate portrayals. Already, writers have sought EIC's advice in depicting Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Aspergers Syndrome, among other mental health issues, in television stories.

EIC's *First Draft* creative briefings bring entertainment industry leaders and creators together with experts and people with lived experience of mental health challenges with the goal of creating accurate portrayals that change viewers' minds about mental health issues.



17th Annual PRISM Awards

PRISM Awards

EIC annually presents the *PRISM Awards*, to honor accurate depictions of drug, alcohol, tobacco use and mental health in movies, television, DVDs, music, comic book and multimedia entertainment. This year, EIC held its *17th Annual PRISM Awards*, where more than 400 people celebrated writers, directors, producers, actors and actresses for their accurate depictions of mental health and substance abuse on April 25, 2013. Among those productions honored at the ceremony were feature films: *Silver*

Linings Playbook and *Flight*, and television shows: *Go On*, *Elementary*, *Nurse Jackie*, *Parenthood*, *Chicago Fire*, *American Horror Story: Asylum*, *Homeland*, *Rehab with Dr. Drew*, and *Days of Our Lives*.

“I’ll share with you a letter from a state trooper: ‘...You may have saved my life...What I found in [Southland] rattled me a bit...I realized I have an issue and I should get help...’ Do accurate depictions of addiction and mental health in media matter? I think they do.”
– Michael Cudlitz at the *PRISM Awards*. 2013

Making News is a Two-Way Street

EIC’s innovative programs to improve news reporting engage journalists and mental health partners on a community level. EIC’s *Picture This* program brings together community stakeholders working in mental health and local media to start a conversation about the community’s needs for mental health education as well as providing journalists with a bank of resources and news story ideas. Through these forums, journalists gain a better understanding of the priorities of the communities they serve through their reporting and community members gain confidence in working with the news media as news sources.

The information garnered from a *Picture This* forum is then turned into a publication that EIC distributes to the media and community stakeholders. The publication is a guide to the key issues within the realm of mental health topics affecting the community. (View the resulting publications from *Picture This* forums [here](#)). *Picture This* panels have been well received by the community and journalist participants alike, with reporters inviting stakeholders to contact them to collaborate on stories. EIC just held a successful *Picture This* forum in July, in partnership with television station KTVU Oakland-San Francisco-San Jose, with stakeholders from counties throughout the San Francisco Bay Area attending. Even after the event, the webcast of this *Picture This* forum continues to be available to reporters as a resource for the stories they write.



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Recognizing that California’s diverse communities face particular challenges when it comes to stigma around mental health challenges, EIC embarked on a unique collaboration with Univision 34 Los Angeles to spark a community dialogue in Spanish between journalists and community members working to improve understanding of mental health issues. *Muestra Esto/Picture This* fosters greater understanding and acceptance of people with mental health challenges in order to decrease misconceptions and increase help-seeking behavior.

“It’s very important that the professionals help us; the media needs to understand what terms to use and when, which words hurt, which words give encouragement, which words we all need to use instead of others. Working in the media, we know that it’s very important. All that is needed now is the right techniques.” -Gabriela Teissier, Co-Host, Noticias 34: Primera Edición, Univision 34 Los Angeles

EIC calls this unprecedented partnership with Univision 34 Los Angeles “amazing,” reaching a huge swath of the Latino community with a message that there is hope following a mental illness diagnosis and to break down barriers that prevent community members from seeking early treatment. Univision now has a reporter dedicated to mental health issues, and the partnership has opened the doors to collaboration with the far-reaching station. EIC has adapted a mental health journalistic style guide and toolkit for Spanish-language journalists and developed additional Spanish language reporting resources. EIC is currently making plans for expanding the relationship to reach other Spanish-language stations throughout California, as well as working with the

media that serve other diverse populations statewide such as African American, Asian American, Latino, Native American, and LGBTQ.

Promotion of the Mental Health Style Guide

Journalists have a substantial influence on the public’s attitudes about mental health. The emphasis a daily newsroom places on breaking news and crises can give people a skewed view of individuals living with mental illness, leading to misperceptions and even discrimination. According to an EIC analysis of news coverage in 2011/2012, English-language journalists refer to individuals with mental illnesses in a negative light in 37 percent of their articles, compared with 23 percent of articles containing positive portrayals. The theme of dangerousness—specifically violent crime against others—was the most common message, seen in 62 percent of all relevant articles.¹

To foster more balanced reporting of mental health issues, EIC has produced the Style Guide: Reporting on Mental Health, that notes ways in which newsrooms can present a more accurate picture of mental illness. EIC’s mental health reporting style guide is available as a print guide and online, in both English and Spanish. (Visit <http://eiconline.org/teamup> to view all the

¹ Entertainment Industries Council, Inc. (2012). *Analysis of English and Spanish Language Newspaper Coverage of Mental Health Issues in California*. Retrieved from: <http://www.eiconline.org/teamup/wp-content/files/california-news-media-analysis-2012.pdf>.



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materials). EIC's outreach to improve mental health reporting as part of CalMHSA's Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative took a giant step when EIC was instrumental in providing the Associated Press recommended guidelines for reporting on mental illness for inclusion in its influential AP Stylebook. The widely used reference guide advises journalists to use accurate, non-derogatory terms to describe mental health conditions and to ensure that inclusion of mental health status only occurs when relevant to the story and confirmed by reliable sources.

To further build sustainability of accurate stories about mental health, EIC extended its successful Generation Next program to colleges and universities throughout California. This innovative program trains college students and faculty in journalism and film/television programs on how to accurately report on stories with a mental health component and how to authentically portray people living with mental illness on screen. The next generation of journalists and entertainment storytellers will start their careers already understanding the importance and power of accurate depictions of mental health issues.

For more information on the Entertainment Industries Council's resources or programs, visit <http://eiconline.org/teamup>, or contact Marie Gallo Dyak, Executive VP Program Services & Government Relations at mgdyak@eiconline.org.