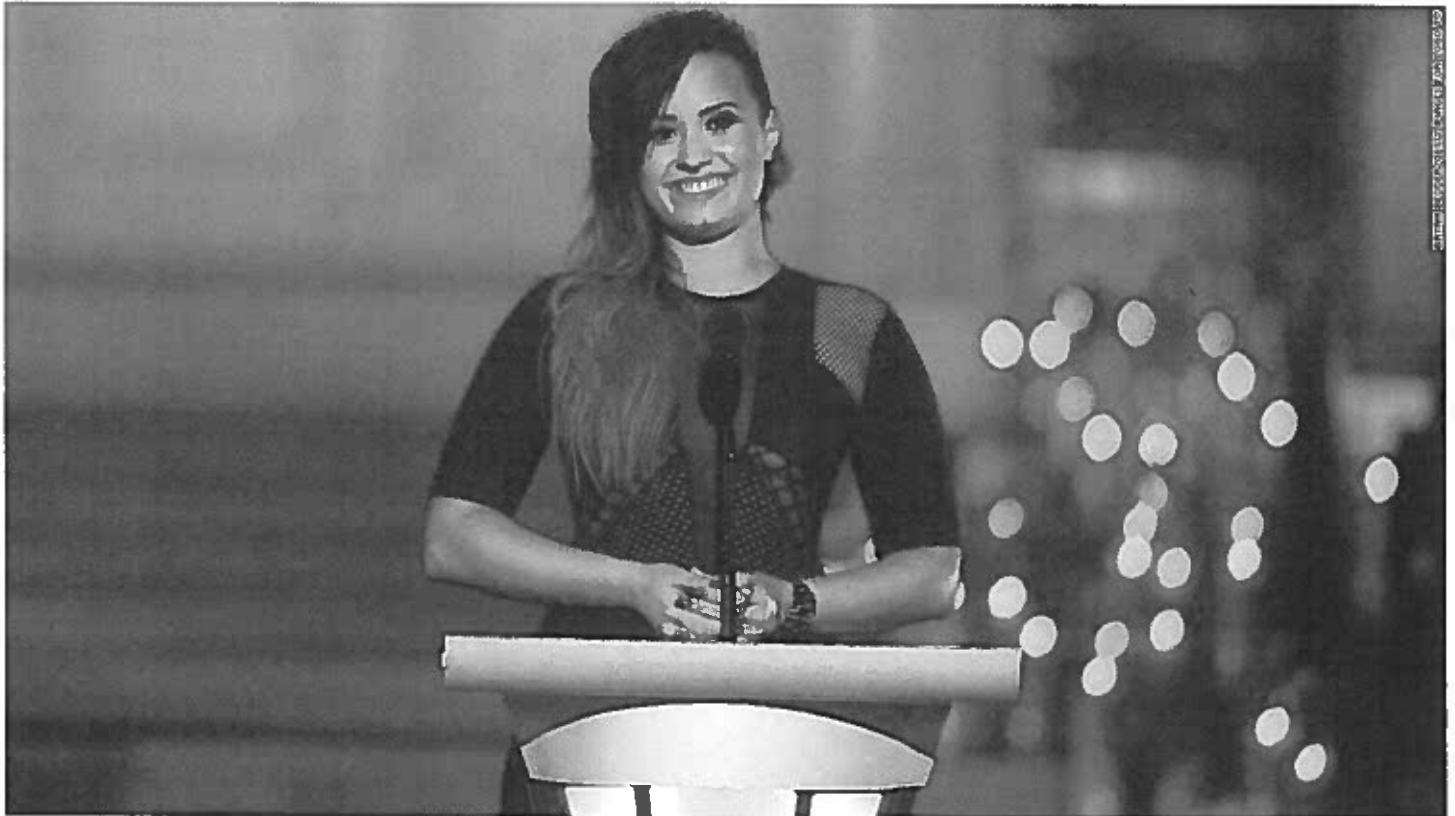


## it most

By Wayne Drash, CNN

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Hollywood star Demi Lovato has become an advocate for the mentally ill after coming forward about her own struggles. "Doing better with bipolar disorder takes work, and it doesn't always happen at once."

**(CNN)** — Too often the nation only hears about mental illness when tragedy strikes. But there are warriors for mental wellness in many fields, fighting for better treatment and working to defy stigma. CNN highlights nine fighters, from the famous to the everyman, who are making a difference.

### 1. Demi Lovato

Actress and singer Demi Lovato stepped into the mental health advocacy role in 2014 by openly discussing her struggles with bipolar disorder.

"I want to show the world that there is life -- surprising, wonderful and unexpected life -- after diagnosis," she says.

In September, Lovato headlined the National Alliance on Mental Illness' "Call to Action" day, telling the audience she will fight for comprehensive mental health reform. She also launched what she calls the Mental Health Listening and Engagement Tour to meet others struggling with mental health issues.

"Those of us here today," she told NAMI supporters, "know that mental illness has no prejudice. It affects people of every race, age, gender, religion and economic status. ... We need to send the simple message to our nation's leaders: Mental health matters and must be taken seriously."

"I had very low periods that were so emotionally draining that I couldn't find the strength to crawl out of bed."

Her diagnosis of bipolar disorder was a "relief in so many ways." It helped make sense of the desperation she had felt for years.

"Even with access to so much," she told the NAMI crowd, "my journey has not been an easy one."

Opinion: Bipolar disorder and the creative mind

The former Disney Channel star's recovery was aided by a comprehensive approach: seeing a therapist, getting proper medication, sticking to a treatment plan, being honest with herself and taking better care of her body.

"Doing better with bipolar disorder takes work, and it doesn't always happen at once."

Mental health advocates say trying to reach America's youth is one of the toughest things in overcoming stigma, and that Lovato's star power helps bridge that divide. She says she's proud of her recovery and that she got the "help that I need."

"You can have that, too."

## 2. Fred Frese

Fred Frese stands as the epitome of successful recovery from mental illness. At 25, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia as a Marine Corps officer, and over the next decade he cycled in and out of military, state, county, Veterans and private hospitals.



COURTESY FRED FRESE

In the summer of 1968, he was picked up by police because "I was trying to convert people to love, peace and justice." A magistrate in Ohio found him insane and committed him to the state psychiatric hospital. "Twelve years after I was declared to be insane," Frese says, "I was promoted to be the director of psychology at Ohio's largest state hospital."

Frese travels the nation promoting mental health treatment, giving speeches and serving as a positive example for those with severe mental illness. He says not enough people in recovery speak publicly because the stigma of mental illness is so strong.

Fred Frese was once declared insane. He eventually headed up psychology at Ohio's largest state hospital.

Frese is a bundle of energy, a man who speaks in rapid-fire fashion almost like an auctioneer. He approaches mental illness as both patient and practitioner: his schizophrenia kept in check by medication and proper care. He says the nation's mental health care system is in need of drastic reform. He points to the rise in homelessness, suicide and the difficulty in

getting treatment.

"This is a national disgrace. We have abandoned, ignored and marginalized persons with these disorders, and something has to be done," he says.

Frese approaches the topic with authority, and with humor. He describes himself as a stand-up schizophrenic. "Particularly proud of being an escaped lunatic," he tells audiences to laughs.



University. He eventually became the director of psychology at Western Reserve Psychiatric Hospital in Ohio. He held that position for 15 years, until his retirement in 1995.

He currently is an associate professor of psychiatry at Northeast Ohio Medical University and a clinical assistant professor at Case Western Reserve University. He also has served for 12 years on the board of directors of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the largest nonprofit advocacy group for the mentally ill.

His latest goal is to convince mental health professionals to "self-disclose" about their struggles with mental problems.

"This is an excellent way to fight stigma," he says. "That's a major part of my new mission."

### 3. Ted Stanley

Ted Stanley, a billionaire businessman and philanthropist, gave the largest donation in psychiatric research history in 2014. The \$650 million donation to the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard is aimed at enhancing scientific research on psychiatric disorders with the hopes of leading to a breakthrough in new treatments.



Ted Stanley has dedicated his personal wealth to find a cure for mental illness.

Stanley has been on a quest the last 2½ decades to get to the root cause of mental health disorders. He saw the need for effective treatment after his son, Jonathon, was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at age 19.

His son responded to medication, but he met countless families whose children's conditions never improved with medication.

"Human genomics has begun to reveal the causes of these disorders. We still have a long way to go, but for the first time we can point to specific genes and biological processes. It's now time to step on the gas pedal," Stanley said in announcing his gift. "I am donating my personal wealth to this goal."

He said his dedication to this cause -- and solution -- is because he witnessed so many other patients and families

have disappointing outcomes. "There was no treatment in sight to end it the way ours had ended with medication solving the problem," Stanley said.

Opinion: How to make mental health care work

Coinciding with the donation was the release of a groundbreaking study on schizophrenia by Broad Institute scientists and hundreds of others. The study identified 108 genes linked with schizophrenia and could result in breakthrough treatment in the years ahead.

"We are finally beginning to gain the deep knowledge about these disorders that we have sought for decades," says Tom Insel, director of the National Institute of Mental Health.

### 4. Sarah Spitz

Sarah Spitz struggled with suicidal thoughts, first in high school and then again in college. The urges only intensified as the stress of college built up.



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COURTESY EM

College senior Sarah Spitz has made it her mission to help students struggling with suicidal thoughts.

students struggling with the demands of college.

Spitz is the president of Emory's chapter of Active Minds, a nonprofit group that links students across the nation and inspires them to speak up about mental health issues. She has seen the group grow from a handful of people to a couple dozen.

"When I first got involved with Active Minds, I felt like a bit of a hypocrite, because I used to be suicidal. I've made multiple suicide attempts," she says. "Then, I was coming at it from the other perspective: trying to prevent suicide by connecting students. It felt kind of strange at first."

Mental health help: Where to turn

It's a role she now embraces because she sees the need for the help and for students to have a peer who can relate. She left Emory her freshman year in 2009 because her mental health was spiraling. She couldn't eat or sleep.

When she returned to school two years later, she felt lost as she went from "being a mental patient to a real person in college."

Active Minds provided her an outlet to "openly talk about where I'd been."

"I will speak up about my own mental health struggles, and I help to encourage others to do the same," she says.

Spitz believes students coming back from medical leave for psychiatric reasons need more help during that transition. She is determined to work with the university in helping future students during that phase.

## 5. Michael Woody

Michael Woody was a police sergeant in Akron, Ohio, when a woman with a long history of mental illness tried to kill him. That incident changed the course of his life work -- to make sure police were properly trained to deal with the mentally ill.



COURTESY MICHAEL WOODY

The woman eventually jumped off a bridge after a grand jury recommended she go to prison for up to 25 years for felonious assault. Woody was the officer who found her body.

"That always stuck with me."

Woody rose through the ranks and eventually became the director of training for officers. He studied how often police went out on calls involving people with mental health problems: at least one in 10 calls, meaning a rookie officer will likely encounter someone experiencing a mental breakdown on their first day.

Michael Woody saw the need for mental health treatment as a police officer. He now trains law enforcement on how best

Woody now heads CIT International, which works with local, state and federal agencies to train officers on how best to "de-escalate a situation when people are in crisis." CIT stands for Crisis Intervention Team training.

view of mental illness. That's because they only get called when there's a crisis."

CIT International has trained more than 3,000 law enforcement departments on how best to respond to mental health calls. Police undergo a 40-hour course in which they meet people with mental illness and their families, tour mental health facilities, and train for an array of scenarios.

Sharing experiences can help

CIT is meant to teach officers to respond with empathy while maintaining their own safety. "We're trying to get officers to understand that this is an illness," Woody says.

Officers typically "don't get to see the person on a good day and usually we don't get to see their parents or their loved ones on a good day."

"In a CIT course, they get to see them on a good day and they hear a heart-wrenching story of a person with mental illness."

And, in turn, a tense situation is calmed without violence. Getting police to understand takes time, Woody says, but it works.

## 6. Mia St. John

Mia St. John rose to become a world-champion boxer, but her big fight was outside the ring.



Mia St. John says she is motivated to change the mental health system. Her grown son committed suicide last fall in a hospital.

She struggled with suicidal tendencies, obsessive compulsive disorder, panic attacks and alcoholism. While she managed to overcome those challenges, the boxer and former Playboy model became an activist for people living with mental illness. She spoke at congressional hearings, worked with Rep. Grace Napolitano, D-California, on improving mental health awareness in schools, and advocated for the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Not only could she relate to the difficulties of living with mental health issues, she also could relate to parents raising a seriously mentally ill child: Her son, Julian, struggled for the last seven years with schizophrenia. At 24, Julian St. John committed suicide inside a psychiatric hospital in November.

"The treatment of our mentally ill in this country is horrific, and I will die trying to expose this messed up system of ours," St. John says.

Despite her fame and wealth, her son was homeless the last several years, living in park bathrooms in Los Angeles. She would visit him, trying to persuade him to get treatment. He was a brilliant artist whose works fetched \$1,500 apiece when he was stable. But that was the trick, trying to keep him healthy.

"When my son was on his meds, there was no stopping him," she says. "He was so talented. He would only wander off to the parks when he was off his meds."

Opinion: Suicide doesn't set you free



knows treatment works. She's living proof. Now, she hopes to expose what she calls the inhumane treatment of the mentally ill for a potential documentary. That, she says, is the best way to honor her late son -- and the hundreds of thousands of other homeless Americans who remain untreated.

"We have to get word out, so that change can get made."

## 7. Leon Evans

Leon Evans believes in the concept of "therapeutic justice," the idea that the mentally ill should get treatment rather than sent straight to the nation's jails and prisons after committing offenses.



"It's not the courts that get them better, it's the treatment," he says.

Evans has been instrumental in bringing together law enforcement authorities, mental health officials, judges, and policymakers in Bexar County in San Antonio, Texas, to work together in dealing with the mentally ill.

"It doesn't make sense to have these people in prison because they don't make good prisoners," he says. "Mentally ill inmates agitate other prisoners and that makes it dangerous for everybody."

Leon Evans helped form a center in San Antonio to keep the mentally ill out of jails and prisons. The center saved the city an estimated \$15 million in 2014.

Evans helped develop what is called the Restoration Center, an integrated mental health service center that opened in 2003. When San Antonio police pick up a mentally ill person, their first stop now is the Restoration Center. Instead of being dumped off at a crowded jail, the mentally ill get proper care at the facility.

As a result, an estimated 25,000 people a year are diverted to the center: people who used to go to jail, the emergency rooms or straight back out on the streets, says Evans. The center saved the city an estimated \$15 million in 2014. In addition, the homeless population was down 70% and the county jail system has 600 empty beds.

Questions hound Maine program: How do you know they won't kill again?

Kansas City and Des Moines opened similar centers last year modeled after the San Antonio facility. Evans, the executive director of the Center for Health Care Services, is in high demand around the country.

"We're happy to share information with folks," he says, "because I think we're doing some good."

## 8. Pete Earley

Best-selling author Pete Earley has become a one-man watchdog of the mental health community and the politics surrounding efforts to reform the nation's mental health system.



Folks in the mental health community -- from those raising children with severe mental illness to policymakers -- keep close track of what Earley writes on his blog.

Opinion: How I overcame depression

Author Pete Earley remains a force in the mental health world, keeping track of reform efforts in Washington.

His book, "Crazy: A Father's Search Through America's Mental Health Madness," is considered the bible among mothers and fathers trying to raise a child with severe mental illness. A 2007 Pulitzer Prize finalist, "Crazy" details Earley's efforts to get care for his son and America's criminalization of the mentally ill.

"Suddenly the two of us were thrown headlong into the maze of contradictions, disparities and Catch-22s that make up America's mental health system," Earley writes.

Since going public with his family's story, Earley has traveled the country and the world discussing the need for better care.

## 9. Creigh Deeds

Virginia State Sen. Creigh Deeds survived being stabbed multiple times by his 24-year-old son in November 2013. His son, Gus, suffered from bipolar disorder and had been turned away by a mental health center because a psychiatric bed could not be found.



Virginia State Sen. Creigh Deeds survived an attack by his son and has since dedicated his life to mental health reform.

Shortly after returning home, Gus stabbed his father with a knife and then shot himself.

Creigh Deeds has turned the tragedy into action. A state lawmaker for more than two decades, he was "always ashamed by Virginia's abysmal ranking" when it came to mental health care. Yet he admits it was never his priority.

Seeing his son decline -- even turned away when he sought treatment -- was the lawmaker's wake-up call.

"I promise you I would give anything to not be in this position today," Deeds said at this year's annual National Alliance on Mental Illness conference.

NAMI honored Deeds with the Richard T. Greer Advocacy Award for his efforts to reform Virginia's mental health laws. "Who knows whether the cure for cancer or the next big idea to save the Earth or to unlock the secrets of the universe is locked in the mind of someone who now struggles with a disease of the brain?" he said. "How many of those bright

minds are locked away in our criminal justice system?"

Deeds: 'The system failed my son'

Deeds signifies a valiant father seeking to make a difference. He says he owes it to his son's legacy and for the millions of others who need proper treatment in America. The Washington Post ran a stellar profile of Deeds and his recovery in November.

"My son was unbelievable," he told NAMI. "He remains, in every respect, a hero. Gus was exactly what I wanted to be. He was smart, handsome, strong, inquisitive, confident. ...

"He could do anything he wanted to do, and do it well. His life was just not long enough."