

enges — and successes

11/16/2008
S.A. Express News
Melvin Stoelge



Nick Holstein looks over the placement of actors in his theater troupe, which performs skits that educate the public about psychiatric illness.

cause of his mental illness — which today performs skits and one-act plays that seek to educate the public about psychiatric illness.

Holstein has become an outspoken advocate about mental disorders among the young, and on a recent October evening his play "Stop The Ride, I Wanna Get Off!" was performed at Our Lady of the Lake University. Partly autobiographical, it illustrates one young man's descent into depression and alcohol abuse.

To put on his play, Holstein teamed up with the OLLU chapter of Active Minds, an organization that seeks to spread awareness about mental health issues on campus through workshops, speakers and other activities.

Rose Espinosa, director of the counseling center at OLLU, says if her group can touch just one life, it's worth it.

"We're here to tell students that even if you have a mental health problem, it doesn't mean you can't be happy and successful," she says. "Just because you're depressed now doesn't mean you'll be depressed your whole life. We want to change that narrative."

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I'm proof of that."

Still, Joe largely keeps his journey with mental illness to himself, not telling his friends or professors.

Not so Nick Holstein, 30, a recent graduate in sociology from UTSA. Holstein was diagnosed with bipolar disorder when he was 22, after selling his car on a lark and moving to Dallas to start a theater company. (In manic states, bipolar sufferers will often display grandiosity. Holstein says his mania is mainly manifested in spending money.)

A stocky, friendly young man whose words come out in an urgent rush, Holstein was living on the streets in Dallas until his uncle and parents came to his rescue. After he was hospitalized and finally diagnosed, he stabilized on medication and attended St. Philip's College and Northwest Vista College before transferring to UTSA, where he was granted accommodations for his illness in the form of extended test-taking times and help with note taking. (By law, students with mental illness must be given such extra support if they request it.)

At UTSA, Holstein joined a peer education support group. From that experience he did, in fact, form his own theater troupe — a dream one doctor told him he had to give up be-



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