

Candlelight vigil raises awareness of mental illness, celebrates hope for possible treatment

By [Miranda Romero](#). On Thursday, October 24th, 2013

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People gathered at Civic Space Park on Wednesday evening with candles and glow sticks held aloft as symbols of recovery and remembrance.

Hosted by ASU's [Center for Applied Behavioral Health Policy](#), the 18th annual [Mental Health Awareness Coalition](#) candlelight vigil recognized people who have mental illness and celebrated the hope that treatment and recovery are possible.

Mental or neurological disorders will affect 1 in 4 people in the world at some point in their lives, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

"This event gives people with mental illness the opportunity to come together and be supported in their fight," events coordinator Brandy Huseman said.

This year's theme was "light up the night for recovery." Candles symbolizing the light of recovery were handed out to attendees. The candles also represented themes such as truth, healing, hope, gratitude and understanding.

A line formed for people who wished to crack a glow stick in remembrance of a loved one who passed away from mental illness. One by one, people cracked their glow sticks and went up to the microphone to say who the glow stick represented.

Earlier in the evening, following a group prayer for recovery, state House Minority Leader Chad Campbell took the stage to discuss state funding for mental-health care programs. The state budget passed by lawmakers in June included \$250,000 to help support programs by [Mental Health First Aid](#), an organization that helps the public understand mental illness.

"We are now investing in the things that matter," Campbell said.

The event encouraged political advocacy for mental-health programs and addressed topics such as hospitalization versus incarceration. In Arizona, nine people with severe mental illness are in jail or prison for every one who is in a hospital.

The event was also punctuated with live musical performances.

Among the night's performers was Elijah Lucas, a member of the youth mental-illness support group [MY LIFE \(Magellan Youth Leaders Inspiring Future Empowerment\)](#).

Lucas lives with bipolar disorder and ADHD. He grew up an orphan and spent 16 years in the foster care system, including shelters and group homes.

He uses his story to inspire others, he said.

"Everybody has something they struggle with, and we all need support," Lucas said.

Also in attendance was Miss Arizona 2013, Kayla Downs. She is a graduate student at Grand Canyon University pursuing a degree in professional counseling.

Having lived with severe depression and anxiety, Downs said she is using her time as Miss Arizona to educate people about the importance of mental health.

The event concluded with Downs joining the attendees onstage to sing "Lean On Me" together.

"Mental health is just as important as physical health," Downs said. "This event shows people that we should no longer be embarrassed of mental illness but rather understanding of it."

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Attendees at the Mental Health Awareness Coalition vigil hold glow sticks representing loved ones lost to mental illness. The vigil also celebrated recovery and advocated for health care. (Sophie Blaylock/DD)