

Mental Health Reform for Massachusetts to be Discussed at STCC;
Public Is Invited to Attend

The past and the future of care for the mentally ill in Massachusetts will be the focus of an event to be held on the morning of Friday, April 3 at Springfield Technical Community College. "This event would be of interest to students, educators, social workers, licensed health counselors, and in fact, anyone in a health field," said Eric Brown, professor of psychology at STCC and organizer of the symposium.

Titled *Saving Hope: Titicut Follies and Mental Health Reform in Massachusetts*, the program is sponsored by the STCC School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Baystate Health, MassDevelopment, and the Human Services Forum.

The program will feature a showing of the film *Titicut Follies*, a keynote address by the film's creator Frederick Wiseman, and a panel discussion with statewide mental health professionals and advocates.

Jenifer Urff, Senior Policy Associate of Advocates for Human Potential Inc., will moderate the panel discussion. Panel members include Elaine Hill, Deputy Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Mental Health; Steven Bradley, Vice President for Government and Community Relations at Baystate Health, and former Regional Director of the Mass. Department of Mental Retardation; Attorney Robert D. Fleischner, Center for Public Representation; Dr. Gregory Bertsch, psychologist; and Rebecca Macauley, former resident of Northampton State Hospital and mental health rights advocate.

The program will begin at 9:00 a.m. with a welcome from Dr. Arlene Rodriguez, Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at STCC, and will continue with an introduction by Eric Brown. At 9:10, Dr. Wiseman will speak, followed by a showing of the film *Titicut Follies* at 9:30. The panel discussion will be held from 11:00 to 12:00, and will be followed by lunch. Music during the luncheon will be provided by The Endless, a musical group composed of musicians with mental health diagnoses.

Brown noted that until fairly recently, people with various mental or other challenges who were grouped under the label of mentally ill, were essentially incarcerated in state institutions in Belchertown, Northampton, Westboro and other locations. Often there was little or no attempt to provide care or treatment. Individuals judged to be a danger to themselves or others were held at the Bridgewater State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

Brown, who once worked in the back wards of two of the institutions, saw residents living out their lives locked in a few barren rooms with occasionally a TV to occupy them. Caretakers had no educational requirements other than a ninth grade education.

Abuses almost inevitably occurred, and conditions at Bridgewater were recorded in 1967 by independent filmmaker Frederick Wiseman, in the shocking film *Titicut Follies*. The film was legally banned by the Commonwealth until 1992. It will be shown at STCC by Wiseman, now a lauded and prolific documentary filmmaker, who has received three Emmys, a

Peabody Award, and a Columbia DuPont Award. His work has been screened in major film festivals around the world.

Due to class action suits in the 1970s, reforms were made in the system leading to a deinstitutionalization movement, resulting in the closing of Northampton State Hospital and Belchertown State School in Western Massachusetts.

Brown said, "I fear that we as a society will forget the monstrosities perpetrated on people with mental illness, mental retardation, and on other stigmatized citizens. This can be forcefully illustrated with the movement of institutionalization that swept through the United States in the latter part of the 19th and well into the 20th centuries. Often, mistakes of the past are repeated, as the historical significance fades from our collective consciousness. Even today, in parts of Massachusetts and other states, institutions are populated, albeit under much more humane conditions, but can neglecting a citizen's full participation in the community ever be fully humane?"

"I have heard rhetoric over the past decade, from politicians in other states, that it may make fiscal sense to re-open some of the institutions, or to once again allow admission. This, I think, is frightening. We ought never to allow ourselves to become so complacent that we do not vigilantly stand up for the rights of those that are shunned. I think the results are in: once you begin to stockpile people into confined spaces — no matter how honorable the intent — alienation, stagnation, and abuse are bound to occur."

"We must never repeat the mistakes that we made," said Brown. "We must be cognizant of the historical aspects of institutionalization; the solution is not to institutionalize, but to find alternative ways of healing."

For registration and information on CEUs, please contact Mary Breeding at Breeding@stcc.edu. For additional event information, contact Eric Brown at EBrown@stcc.edu.