

SMI Caregiver Academy (SMICA)

Knowledge - Insight - Empathy - Healing

A non-profit dedicated to helping Caregivers improve
their relationship with their Loved Ones

Practical, Actionable Tools and Best Practices for Caregivers

Round and Round We Go

A SMI Caregiver Academy Whitepaper



Summary: Severe Mental Illness (Bipolar, Schizoaffective, Schizophrenia) strikes approximately 3 to 4% of the world's population. Those afflicted are trapped in a seemingly endless carousel of hopeless alternatives: homeless, incarceration, crisis hospitalizations only to be "treated and street'ed", guardianship, conservatorship, and well-meaning but inadequately funded programs. There is a path, however, hiding in plain sight, all too rarely taken but ironically is the one which is NEAREST to us. Research has shown, using approaches like the NEAREST methodology, SMI re-hospitalizations can be reduced by up to 77%. This whitepaper explains that path.

Round and Round We Go

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If ever there was a roadmap to SMI Recovery, it might look like this.

Most of these roads are all too familiar to SMI Caregivers. Getting the help our **Loved Ones** need and the help we need feels like an endless round-and-round-we-go-where-it-ends-nobody-knows.

Except, tragically, we **DO** know where all too often it does end - homelessness / addiction / prison ... or grave.

There is one path, however, hiding in plain sight which is all too rarely taken but ironically it is the one which is **NEAREST** to us. The **NEAREST** approach is being used successfully by (CGs) caregivers, (LOs) Loved Ones, and their families across the globe. The **NEAREST** path, when followed intentionally and carefully can:

- Reduce the number and durations of Loved Ones' hospitalizations
- Shorten the course of the worst symptoms
- Accelerate symptom relief
- Speed meaningful recovery for Loved One, Caregivers, and family alike

NEAREST is an acronym which stands for:

- **N**eurochemistry – caregivers learning the basics of brain neurochemistry and how SMIs affect it
- **E**mpathy – caregivers noticing and gaining deep insight into what their Loved Ones are experiencing
- **A**gency – caregivers respecting the right of their adult Loved One to make their own decisions
- **R**egulating – caregivers learning Emotional Intelligence and regulating our own emotions
- **E**mulate – caregivers modeling (not preaching) the behaviors to be emulated
- **S**trategizing – caregivers partnering with Loved Ones to collaboratively solve problems
- **T**eaming – caregivers on "Team Loved One", advocating for them with family and doctors

Once Caregivers are trained and successfully following the **NEAREST** methodology:

- CG-LO Relationships improve, becoming mutually respectful, loving, and supportive
- LOs become more open to medical and therapeutic help
- Stress and tension between CGs and LOs can **DRAMATICALLY** diminish
- CGs gain more realistic expectations of their LO's medical condition and recovery
- LOs can begin to feel better about their abilities, recovery, and progress
- Mutual respect is again possible between CG and LOs.

The **NEAREST** methodology shares common elements with several very well-known methods:

- FFT (Family Focused Therapy) pioneered by Dr. David Miklowitz of UCLA
- LEAP Method – Dr. Xavier Amador of the Treatment Advocacy Center
- Psychosis REACH – University of Washington SPIRIT Center

The **NEAREST** methodology also draws from the research and insights:

- Theory of Cognitive Development – Jean Piaget, Swiss Psychologist
- Theory of Moral Development – Lawrence Kohlberg, American Psychologist
- Emotional Intelligence – Salovey and Mayer, SIYLI (Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute)
- Amygdalae Research – Heinrich Kluver and Paul Bucy
- CBT, DBT, and CBTp – Aaron Beck, Marsha Linehan, Dr. Douglas Turkington (UK)
- Trauma – Dr. Bessel van der Kolk (The Body Keeps The Score)

The SMI Caregiver Academy, a non-profit dedicated to SMI Caregiver Education, has been teaching the **NEAREST** methodology since 2019 with outstanding reviews from families across America and Europe.

The **NEAREST** methodology is taught in a 12-week online class entitled, *"Love Can't Fix Serious Mental Illness"*. Caregivers from multiple families meet online and are led through a series of presentations, discussions, and family-specific exercises.

Before class begins, Caregivers document actual interactions they've had with their Loved One(s). During the class, Caregivers analyze those interactions through the perspective of multiple lenses with the goal of dramatically improving their relationship with their Loved One.

IOP and PHP programs provide psychoeducation for their patients, but major holes exist in providing training for Caregivers. As a result, patients often return to the same dysregulated home environment spurring repeated hospitalizations, exacerbating stress and tension - resulting in new episodes for Loved Ones and Caregivers alike.

Beginning in 2026, IOP and PHP programs, clinicians, hospitals, mental-health case managers and social workers can partner with SMICA to team-teach the "Love Can't Fix Serious Mental Illness" class to families and caregivers, using SMICA's **NEAREST** Methodology. SMICA proactively works with IOP/PHP programs, clinics, agencies, and support groups to validate the approach, material and modify it, as needed, to meet local needs and perspectives.

SMICA headquarters are in suburban Chicago.

To inquire, contact:

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About the Author: Michael Uram is a retired educator and 20+ year caregiver for two adults who have a schizophrenia-spectrum illness. He is lead admin of the BiPolar SMI Family Education and Advocacy Support Group for caregivers on Facebook which has 5,600 families as members and Chief Education Officer of the SMI Caregiver Academy. You can follow Michael's work at: Patreon.com/SMICaregiver Caregiver Q&A column: AskSMICA@SMICaregiverAcademy.com