

OBITUARY

CSB Member David O'Brien Dies

'A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.' Book of Proverbs.



**David Akira
O'Brien**

When David O'Brien walked into a room everybody smiled. That's the first thing his friends and family thought of when the word spread that David Akira O'Brien had died at the age of 50 on July 14. Just a few days before, on July 8, he had taken part in the annual planning retreat of the Alexandria Community Services Board and as usual he was there early, ready with a joke and, as usual, some tough questions.

"He was always so nice to me," said fellow board member Dana Payne. "I would walk into a meeting and his face would light up 'Dana, Dana I've got a good one for you,' and out would come a joke. He always made the effort to talk to new people and make them feel at home on the Board. We lost a very thoughtful intelligence and a kind, kind heart."

That was why the room was packed at his memorial service on July 20 at the Everly-Wheatley Funeral Home, where people gathered to remember their friend, the advocate, the activist, the jokester, the loving and always concerned friend, son, brother and uncle.

At his memorial service CSB Executive Director Michael Facets of David and how one measured a man. In David's case it was "The measure of how many people you have helped in your life." For David it was too many to count.

For the past four years he had been a member of the Alexandria Community Services Board where he served on the acute care and extended care services committee. He was also the board's liaison to the Sheltered Homes of Alexandria Board and the Local Human Rights Committee and the Ethics committee.

He worked as a counselor and mentor with Family Teamwork, Inc. and he served on the Board of the Northern Virginia Mental Health Consumer Association and was a representative on the Consumer Empowerment and Leadership Training Program. He was also a director on the Northern

Virginia Board for the National Alliance on Mental Illness and was formerly a board member of the Laurie Mitchell Employment Center

But as Dr. Gilmore noted "David did not just sit on these committees and boards. He was an active participant on all of them and rarely missed a meeting."

Most of the time he arrived early so he could greet every one coming in and share his latest joke. Once the meeting started he listened intently, read every word and asked tough questions. He was a strong advocate for people with mental disabilities and

was dismayed by the actions taken at state and national levels to cut funding.

"His zeal for change never wavered but it was always leavened with good cheer and a terrific sense of humor," Dr. Gilmore said

"David leaves a big hole in the cadre of mental health advocates in Northern Virginia. He leaves a bigger hole on the Alexandria Community Services Board. And he leaves the biggest hole of all in our hearts," Gilmore said.

Fellow Board member James Gladden noted in his comments at the memorial service that the story of David was told in the fifth chapter of Mark in which Jesus cures a man with demons.

"I believe David and I will meet again at God's feet and we will be fully clothed and in our right minds," Gladden said. "And like the demoniac at Gerasene we will be telling everyone what the Lord did for us when he cast out our demons and healed us."

Yet another side of David was his love of parties and music. He played the harmonica and was a member of The Capitol Harmonica Club. At the open house for the clubhouse a few years ago he played. Once when CSB Board Chair Mary Riley asked board members what could be done to make the board more effective, David had an answer. "We need more board parties."

"He was as intense in his fun as he was in his advocacy for people

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with mental illness," said Gilmore.

"Dave not only brought insight and commitment to our board, he served as our liaison to several other community organizations. Most of all we will truly miss the joy and camaraderie that Dave brought to our meetings. He will be sorely missed," said Riley

David O'Brien is survived by his mother Toshie O'Brien; his brother

Thomas O'Brien and wife Phyllis; his sister-in-law Margaret O'Brien Hellen; and four nieces: Kisa, Danielle, Katherine and Caitlin O'Brien. He was preceded in death by his father Donald J. O'Brien and brother, Jeffrey O'Brien.

Contributions may be made in his name to the Friends of Alexandria Mental Health Center, 720 N. St. Asaph St., Alexandria.

—MARY ANNE WEBER

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—Dana Payne