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Transition: Gentle acoustic guitar.

John Moe: Hi, John Moe here. This is a special bonus episode of *Depresh Mode*. I'm glad you're here.

I wanna keep you updated on the situation that's going on here in Minnesota, where I live. And I wanna be super clear: *Depresh Mode* is not a news show. We're a mental health show. And also, as well, the ICE activity—the arrests, the deaths, the disappearing—it's a mental health story. It's a story about community mental health, and it's weighing on everyone. It's causing depression and anxiety among people who have never had a problem with that before. And for people already experiencing mental illness, especially severe mental illness, this is disastrous.

I'm far from being the only person saying this kind of thing. A lot of people are—including the largest mental health advocacy organization in the state, NAMI Minnesota. NAMI stands for the National Alliance on Mental Illness. NAMI Minnesota is the state organization. Marcus Schmit is the executive director and joins me now. Marcus, welcome to the show.

Marcus Schmit: Hey, thanks so much, John. I really appreciate the opportunity.

John Moe: Marcus, you and I know each other a little bit, and we have been talking about the situation here and what we could potentially do about it. You recently put out a statement from NAMI Minnesota about the effect of what's happening, particularly among people with serious and persistent mental illness. How is that different from the stress and emotions that everyone's experiencing?

Marcus Schmit: Yeah. Well, we know that people who have severe and persistent mental illness are folks who have already been navigating a lot of challenges in their own lives and have experienced trauma. You know, they might be carrying a lot of weight from previous experiences. And what has happened as this occupation just continues is symptoms are increasing, intensifying. A lot of these conditions are manifesting themselves into just people who are in these states that they haven't experienced in a while. And as a result of that, we're getting more phone calls; we're getting more emails. There's just an uptick in contact. A lot of our classes and trainings are filling up.

And some of these contacts—through email and phone calls—from these individuals or loved ones are— They're just really concerning. I mean, the weight of what is continuing to happen here in Minnesota, it's affecting a lot of people in some really harmful ways.

John Moe: So, when we talk about the people being severely affected, who falls under that category and who doesn't? Like, what kind of conditions are we talking about? What levels of severity are we talking about among the people that you are most concerned about and that prompted you to put out the statement?

Marcus Schmit: We're talking about individuals who are experiencing bipolar, schizophrenia, intense anxiety, among other conditions that fall under severe and persistent mental illness.

John Moe: Okay. I mentioned I think a lot of people are feeling—everybody I know is feeling this to some extent. But what is the outcome you're trying to avoid if people are already in a bad state, and it gets worse as a result of this heightened stress and pressure? What are the—(*sighs*). I mean, it's hard to discuss but it's necessary. What are those outcomes that we're trying to avoid?

Marcus Schmit: We're really trying to avoid an increase in suicide. We're trying to avoid an overwhelming of mental health resources in Minnesota, and we're really trying to avoid individuals who are stable from becoming unstable. And the level of effort that it's gonna take our community to recover from the trauma and the grief that we've been experiencing over the last several weeks is already gonna be hard enough. And I think we really worry that many of these individuals are gonna get lost in the cracks as we're trying to recover.

John Moe: “Get lost” in terms of suicide, but getting lost too in just not being able to track them down and help them. Yeah.

Marcus Schmit: Absolutely. Absolutely. Isolation, I think, is a significant concern that we have. The impact on those around them and, you know, the just—I think—compounding effect that can have on resources within the community. One thing that we do at NAMI is we offer free classes and trainings for individuals. We're offering Introduction to Trauma, and then there's sort of a next level trauma course right now.

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Typically, those courses— You know, we allow for 60-70 registrants, and they may take a week/a couple weeks to fill up. Recently, what has happened is we've opened those courses up for registration; they fill up in hours. And this is the type of pressure that we're seeing. People who are seeking our resources who might not have had a relationship with us before are getting attention from us, understandably so. And then I imagine that is also— And I understand that's also the scenario that's playing out with other mental health resources in the community. There's just—there's gonna be too much demand for a system that

doesn't have the capacity to respond. And we know that people who have, you know, severe and persistent mental illnesses, they have a higher level of need and care. And I'm just really concerned about what that ability for the community to respond to that need is gonna be.

John Moe: I was wondering then if that can scale. Like, if your classes are filling up, can you open three or four new classes? Or do you just not have the capacity, the people, the money, the physical space to do that?

Marcus Schmit: So, we're having that conversation right now—doing what we can to reallocate resources, but like a lot of nonprofits— I mean, we're small and scrappy. Right? We're running our lean budget. And what we have to our advantage is we have an incredible team that is pivoting to work to meet that need. But you know, we're in Minnesota. So, I'm gonna use the analogy “we're trying to skate to where the puck is gonna be” in the coming months.

(John laughs.)

To think about “how do we, at NAMI Minnesota, seek to get more resources to respond to and help this community shift out of the sort of trauma and grief in the moment to recovery?” So, yeah. Adding classes and also thinking about community partnerships. And bringing in more resources, frankly.

John Moe: I mean, people are doing what we've been telling them to do—what I've been telling people to. Go out and get help. If you're in bad shape, go out and get help, call upon these resources. And you're there to receive them. But it's just—you know, it's so much. Like, I imagine people who've never reached out before are just figuring out how to even do that— I mean, I'm sure that's being reflected in just the phone calls coming into NAMI too.

Marcus Schmit: Yeah, it really is. And I would also say the folks who are reaching out to us as well— I mean, we're seeing an uptick in, you know, other nonprofit organizations and businesses who are just trying to support their employees who are struggling with the images and the experiences that they're having—directly or indirectly—in their communities. So many people are impacted by this. You know, I'm a dad. I have an eight- and nine-year-old. And they attend public school, and we've had a conversation for a few weeks now about what is going on in this community. “It's not normal, but your feelings and your response to this is very normal.”

That's a conversation I never thought I would have to have with my kids. You know? About why are some of their classmates not in the classroom right now, right? Why are there parents with vests and whistles outside of the school? Just

some of these experiences—they might seem insignificant, but the ripple effect of this on the kids, on the parents who are trying to support them, on parents who are also sort of navigating their day-to-day pressures and seeing what's happening with their coworkers and friends— It is compounding in a way that I think we're really just gonna have to start to prepare for what the next chapter of this is in Minnesota.

John Moe: I think it's gonna be with us for a really long time. And it's a community too, and I want people outside Minnesota to think about this. It's a community that has experienced George Floyd and everything that happened with his murder. And Philando Castile before that. And then, like everybody else, COVID. Like, from a mental health standpoint, we've been reeling for some time. And then punched again.

Are you seeing— I mean, I know you haven't been at NAMI Minnesota all that long, but as a person from around here—a person in the community—are you seeing the ripple effects on mental health from all those other things that Minnesota's already been through?

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Marcus Schmit: Oh, without a doubt. And we both experienced this, John, being members of this community.

John Moe: Yeah.

Marcus Schmit: You know, what I wanna say is: I'm incredibly proud to be a Minnesotan right now. The way that our neighbors and other members of the community have stepped up to meet this moment is inspiring. I mean, it really is. It's the new Minnesota Miracle in a lot of ways. And this does feel a lot like COVID doesn't it? I mean, just the isolation, the unease in public spaces. But instead of Minnesotan's wearing the masks right now, ICE agents are.

And the impact of that, I think, is just a completely different level that we— To your point—we are gonna be managing for a while when this current sort of state of affairs hopefully unwinds. And hopefully it unwinds soon.

John Moe: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. The decomposition, meaning just this lack of balance. Like, everybody I know is off balance, and I think that's such a—

Marcus Schmit: Yeah, that's a great way to put it, John. That's a great way to put it. It just very much feels like that, doesn't it?

John Moe: Yeah.

Two-part question here. Were we already in a public health crisis with mental health before this occupation happened? And are we now in an even greater public health crisis in Minnesota, given what's happening?

Marcus Schmit: I think the question is the answer.

John Moe: Yeah.

Marcus Schmit: In many ways, the productive attention that has been directed towards mental health has been lacking. My hope—and I know that this is shared—is that a silver lining to this tragic experience that we're having together is that there will be more attention and a more concerted effort towards supporting people by investing in mental health. And I think a more inclusive conversation. And at NAMI Minnesota, one thing that we're really focusing on right now and something that I care deeply about is “how do we invite more people to participate in the work and in the conversation, so that more people understand where the resources are? They know what to do to take that first step. They know what the signs are in a loved one to help them get connected to the support that they need.”

This has been a lot of collective grief and trauma, and I think the only way that we're gonna recover is collectively. And so, my hope is that—out of this—there is gonna be more attention and more intentionality around what we do with respect to mental health in Minnesota.

John Moe: Yeah. I mean, I think— Like, people from out of state are often asking me, “How are you doing?” (*Chuckles dryly.*) You know?

And I feel kind of a compulsion. I fight it, but a compulsion to say, “Oh, we're gonna be fine!” (*laughs*) even when I'm not sure we're gonna be fine. But I do take a lot of— The message that I try to convey is that I know more of my neighbors than I've ever known before. I feel more a part of this community. I feel like we're all on the same page more than we've ever been before. And this is already a community that is pretty tight knit. Always has been. But I feel like, as the threat has grown, the strength of that sense of community and looking out for one another has grown with it. And that's maybe our best hope.

Marcus Schmit: I couldn't agree with you more on that, John. I'm so inspired by how many people are doing so many simple things that are contributing to what you're describing. It's just really authentic community. Picking up groceries, providing transportation for somebody, grabbing a vest and a whistle and standing on a corner outside of school, just checking in on a neighbor. This is— I mean,

this is not complicated. And yet, the fact that so many Minnesotans are rallying right now in this manner? It is really creating this shared experience that—like I said—I mean, I think there is gonna be this Minnesota pride that is gonna stick with us as a result of this experience.

John Moe: I've told people about what happens if it snows a lot and your car is spinning out. And then like all the doors around you fly open, and people ascend like a flock of birds to push your car out.

(Marcus agrees.)

I think we're kind of doing that *(chuckling)* in a metaphorical sense right now, and, uh—yeah.

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Marcus Schmit: Yep. In a lot of ways! I feel like that's very true. That's very true, John.

John Moe: You mentioned in the letter, in the statement that you released, the mobile crisis response teams. And I want to touch on that a little bit. What are those?

Marcus Schmit: Yeah. Thanks, John. I'm glad we're talking about some specific resources. So, every county in the state has a mobile crisis response team, and these are groups of individuals—they wear multiple hats in the community. 'Cause that's what we do in Minnesota. And they're led by mental health professionals. And what we really encourage people to do is to leverage these mobile crisis response teams when there is a mental health crisis taking place.

Typically, what people will do is call 911. If you are physically in danger, yep! However, that is not the right resource for somebody who is experiencing mental health crisis. We want people to go to [JustCallMN.com](https://www.justcallmn.com). Look up your county mobile crisis team. Take that phone number, put it in your contacts on your phone. Because if and when you're a part of one of those situations—whether it's somebody you know, yourself, or somebody that you're encountering in the community—you contact that resource. It's confidential. Those folks show up as quickly as possible, and not only do they provide that immediate intervention, but they stick with you until you're in a stable situation as well. So, these are some of the best of us in Minnesota doing this work.

John Moe: So, that's if you're at risk of hurting yourself or others, you call one of these?

Marcus Schmit: If you are experiencing a mental health crisis. So, if— Again, this is—you know, we really just wanna reinforce the fact that this is in response to a mental health crisis situation.

John Moe: Emergency. Okay.

Marcus Schmit: Yes. Yep. That is your go-to.

John Moe: Okay. And does that cost money?

Marcus Schmit: No! It's free.

John Moe: Okay. Okay. Immigrants, undocumented people, are eligible as well?

Marcus Schmit: It is for every resident of Minnesota. It is confidential. And these are really effective resources for people. And we're doing everything that we can to promote this resource, because it is effective. And we know that there is definitely an increasing need right now for mobile crisis response.

John Moe: Okay. Every county in Minnesota has this. Give us the website one more time?

Marcus Schmit: [JustCallMN.com](https://www.justcallmn.com).

John Moe: Okay. The statement—like I say—was really moving. And I admire the leadership that NAMI Minnesota is taking in putting it out there and kind of calling attention to the mental health crisis and the people who are at mortal risk from what's happening right now, from what's happening to us.

Is your organization going to recommend any action? I know it's not normally the thing you do, but are you going to call for a withdrawal of ICE? An abolition of ICE?

Marcus Schmit: Oh, we've been out there. We have.

John Moe: Okay.

Marcus Schmit: Yep, yep. I mean, we've been out front. You know, I've made public comments about it as well. We want ICE outta Minnesota. In terms of, you know, action—as far as the existence of the agency—you know, I and NAMI, you know, are not taking a position on that right now, but we certainly feel like this approach is actually more harmful than doing nothing. Right?

(John agrees.)

You know, I'm not weighing in on immigration enforcement, but we know the aggression, the intimidation, the physical violence that ICE agents have brought to Minnesota has made our communities less stable; has made people, I think, feel more defeated and hopeless. And we know that it's really impacted those individuals who are already navigating the challenges of severe, persistent mental illnesses.

John Moe: Where do you find your hope to fuel you?

Marcus Schmit: In so many ways. You know, I think it starts with this incredible team that we have at NAMI Minnesota, inspired every day by how people are rallying and seeking out ways to support people in our community. Every time I go to pick up my kids at school, seeing parents, grandparents, probably people who don't even have kids at that school—standing on the street corner with the vest and the whistle. Everybody that's doing something that is simple.

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It may not feel like a lot, but it's contributing to this incredible web of support that— You know, frankly, I referred to it— It is the Minnesota Miracle. And we're setting an example for our fellow Americans, and we are setting an example for the world about how to respond to the mistreatment of our friends and neighbors.

John Moe: My goal is for the term “ice” to just mean the thing that you put your special shoes on for.

Marcus Schmit: *(Sighs into a chuckle.)* That's— John, you and I have a lot in common.

(John laughs.)

And here in Minnesota—you know, we're always optimistic, right?

(John confirms.)

Especially this time of the year. Because it's dark; it's cold; it's—you know, the snow has melted, and then it refreezes. So, there are three or four inches of ice just about everywhere. And I want the ice to melt, and I want the ICE to leave town.

John Moe: My dad always said his favorite season was winter, because it meant that spring was just around the corner. And I said, “Well, what's so great about Spring?”

He said, “Well, that means that summer's almost here.”

(They laugh.)

Marcus Schmit: Uhhhh...

John Moe: So, we'll get there. We'll get there! We'll get there to warmer weathers, and we'll melt the ICE.

Marcus Schmit: Yeah, we will.

John Moe: Marcus Schmit is the Executive Director of NAMI Minnesota. Marcus, thanks.

Marcus Schmit: John, thanks for everything. Appreciate you.

Music: “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

John Moe: You can read that statement we've been talking about from NAMI Minnesota. We have a link on our show page.

Thank you for joining us for this special episode. We have a wonderful episode coming out on Monday with the writer Niko Stratis. Please join us for that.

Depresh Mode is made possible by your contributions. We really need donations in order to keep this show humming along, so we can help people out. And as you know—as you've heard—the need to help people is stronger than ever. Just go to MaximumFun.org/join, become a member, and thanks for that.

Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We got booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, “Building Wings”. *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

Music:

I'm always falling off of cliffs, now

Building wings on the way down

I am figuring things out

Building wings, building wings, building wings

No one knows the reason

Maybe there's no reason

I just keep believing

No one knows the answer

Maybe there's no answer

I just keep on dancing

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!