

# Matthew's Story

**Tucson District 17 (Sen. Wadsack, Rep. Jones, Rep. McGarr)**

Matthew Patrick Quinn: July 26, 1984 – July 7, 2023



Imagine your life is pretty normal. You work at a grocery store to pay for college. You graduate from aircraft mechanic school, get a good job that you love, and are enjoying the life of a typical 29-year-old man.

Then one day you start hearing voices. People around you start shouting, "You idiot. What are you a child molester? You stupid imbecile. Look how ugly you are! We can track your cell phone; we know you are a thief and a pedophile." You come to believe that police and secret government agencies are watching you, following your every move. Perhaps they are trying to kill you.

This is not a vivid imagination or "internal dialogue." This is not "negative self-talk" or a psychological problem involving low self-esteem. For Matthew Patrick Quinn, this was the onset of schizophrenia, a dangerous and neurodegenerative brain condition that causes people to see things, hear things, and believe things that are not real. Like most individuals experiencing a psychosis disorder like schizophrenia, Matthew perceived the auditory hallucinations as completely real. And they didn't stop. 24 hours a day, 7 days per week strange and hostile people followed him, yelled at him, and did strange things.

Before the illness, Matthew was a gentle, sensitive, and kind person. He could make anyone laugh. He would give you a hug and you could feel the love. Aviation was his passion. He excelled in school and went on to work for an aerospace company. But as the illness set in, the dysfunction in his brain became louder than any other voice in his life, and the sparkle in his eyes slowly disappeared.

Like most people with schizophrenia, Matthew was unable to comprehend that he was sick. How do you help someone who is afraid and paranoid? You can try to encourage them to go to a doctor. But what if they can't recognize they are ill? What if they just won't go?

Matthew's family tried everything they could to help him. It was a journey that spanned ten years of Matthew's life. It included Court Ordered Treatment, hospitals, treatment facilities and expensive private doctors. But trying to navigate Arizona's system for Serious Mental Illness was nearly impossible. Many times, Matthew's family felt like the system was working against them. The doctors at Matthew's SMI clinic, Cope Community Services in Tucson, would not return phone calls. Facilities assured the family they could treat Matthew – but a few months later, they would say "there's nothing we can do; Matthew is the kind that ends up on the streets."

The sad thing is, there ARE ways to effectively treat schizophrenia – even "treatment resistant schizophrenia" like Matthew had. But Matthew never received this chance. He needed long-term high-efficiency antipsychotic treatment and psychosis-informed therapy in a secure facility. But such facilities either don't exist in Arizona or have been underfunded and cut from budgets. There were no beds available for people like Matthew. We need to end this profound discrimination against treatment-resistant schizophrenia.

Without effective treatment, Matthew deteriorated into a dangerous and bizarre world where he thought he was a celebrity in a Steven Spielberg film, he thought Justin Bieber was stealing his song lyrics, and he became fixated on certain religions. He accused his family of lying and keeping secrets. He started knocking on neighbors' doors and asking them strange questions. He began to "disappear" for several days at a time.

Schizophrenia is also deadly. Statistically, 1 in 20 sufferers die by suicide. Matthew lost his battle with his illness on July 7th, 2023. He died by a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Despite his family's best effort to keep him safe, there was no secure facility available for Matthew. His SMI services were woefully inadequate, and Matthew was able to get a gun and end his life. When Matthew's family found his body, there were stickie notes all over his apartment that said, "Do not listen to the voices." He was 3 weeks shy of his 39th birthday.

Schizophrenia may have affected Matthew, but it did not define him; it held him captive. What could have helped Matthew? Or others who are struggling today?

We need to expand SMI services in Arizona and hold the SMI providers accountable. We need more highly trained and better trained behavioral health staff. We need more treatment facilities specifically for schizophrenia and serious mental illnesses, like the secure residential treatment programs funded by SB1101. We need more long-term psychiatric facilities and access to beds at the Arizona State Hospital. Long-term treatment needs to be compassionate, competent and safe, with oversights granted by SB1100 and SB1103.

Schizophrenia is different than anxiety and depression and needs a higher level of skill and expertise to treat. Family voices need to be heard in both intervention and in treatment. Mothers and families are often the ONLY voice for loved ones suffering with debilitating brain illnesses.

Schizophrenia is just like other brain conditions such as Alzheimer's or severe autism. The suffering individuals cannot speak for themselves. But they still deserve treatment and care.