

## A support group can be a lifeline

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Eileen Ryan, who coordinates the Law School's pro bono program, has been volunteering for 14 years with the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance. (Photo by Sally Asher)

Quite often, the most effective solution to a situation is simply filling a need. Eileen Ryan recognized a need to inform the public and offer support when she started volunteering with the [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](#) (DBSA) of New Orleans in 2000.

DBSA is a nonprofit, volunteer-run organization, which according to its purpose statement “desires to provide help, hope and support for those who have depression or bipolar disorder, and their families.”

The organization is essential because depression and bipolar disorder often leave people feeling misunderstood and isolated, says Ryan, who has worked as the program coordinator for [Public Interest Programs](#) at Tulane Law School for the past 26 years.

She works with other DBSA volunteers on the first and third Tuesdays of the month at Tulane Lakeside Hospital, where she meets with the groups and facilitates tables for discussion. She serves as the liaison with the hospital, manages the library and free materials, and handles general administrative duties and decisions.

But while this work is essential to maintaining the effective operation of DBSA, the life force of the group is conversation and education.

“Peer support groups involve a self-help process for family, friends and people diagnosed with bipolar disorder or depression,” Ryan says. “In this setting you are able to meet people from your community who can relate to your experiences.”

Ryan has forged lifelong friends through her participation in the [New Orleans chapter of DBSA](#) for the past 14 years, and is still continually astounded by the courage and fortitude of the people she meets through it.

“While the situation may not be “fixed” or resolved, attendees say they feel tremendous relief and hope knowing that they are understood,” Ryan says.

There is no charge to participate in the DBSA groups. For more information, email [Eileen Ryan](#).

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