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# Bay Area mom fights for people with mental illness after son's police killing

Since Taun Hall's son Miles was killed in 2019, the Miles Hall Foundation has become a leading Bay Area voice addressing emergency response to people in crisis



Taun Hall is photographed at Remembrance Park in Walnut Creek on Jan. 26, 2025. Hall founded a mental health nonprofit after her son Miles, who struggled with mental illness, was shot and killed by police in 2019 near their home. Remembrance Park is located near Las Lomas High School where Miles Hall graduated in 2014. (Jose Carlos Fajardo/Bay Area News Group)

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By **MARTHA ROSS** | Bay Area News Group

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For parents like [Taun Hall](#), the killing of Rob Reiner and his wife, Michele, allegedly at the hands of their 32-year-old son, became another painful reminder of the life-and-death struggles they often face in getting treatment for an adult child with a serious mental illness.

Hall's son [Miles was shot and killed by police](#) a block from their home in Walnut Creek on June 2, 2019. The 23-year-old was gripped by symptoms of psychosis, believing he was Jesus and running around the neighborhood with a gardening tool that he said was his staff of God.

[Hall called 911 to get him medical help](#) as a necessary step toward a conservatorship. Instead, she got an armed police response. Those officers shot Miles, sending him to the hospital where he died from his injuries. As Hall experienced the tremendous grief of the moment, another feeling emerged alongside it: resolve. As they left the hospital, Hall told her mother, "I know what I'm supposed to do. My calling is here."

Since then, Hall and the nonprofit Miles Hall Foundation have become one of the leading Bay Area voices on behalf of decriminalizing mental illness and changing public discourse around conditions, including schizoaffective disorder, which is characterized by symptoms of both bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Miles was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder nine months before he was killed.

Working with state legislators, the foundation successfully worked to help pass AB988, the Miles Hall Lifeline Act, in 2022. It imposes a monthly surcharge on California telecommunications access lines to provide an ongoing source of funding for 24/7 crisis centers and mobile crisis teams in every county.

This year, Hall also has been helping to promote a powerful new documentary, "[No One Cares About Crazy People](#)," which is getting a national rollout this year, with [screenings scheduled](#) in Los Angeles on March 1 and possibly in the Bay Area in May.

Narrated by "Better Call Saul" actor Bob Odenkirk, the documentary features an interview with Gov. Gavin Newsom and reveals the experiences of the Halls and several other families to push for a mental health system overhaul in California and in the United States.

The documentary looks at how existing laws and policies, along with the dearth of hospital beds and community-based resources, make it "nearly impossible" for families to help their loved ones get treatment. About half of people with serious mental illness have anosognosia, a condition that makes it difficult for them to understand they are ill and to accept treatment.

Hall and the other families believe that people with mental illness are often ignored, mistreated and "thrown away by society," she said.

"There are a lot of stories like ours out there," Hall said. "Our work is really in prevention and making sure we're educating the community toward compassion instead of criminalization. If you have a voice, you need to show up to let your elected officials know. You can literally move mountains."

**Q:** Through Miles' junior high and the early years of high school, you've said that he was doing fine. And he was always a gentle, sweet kid. But when you look back, were there early signs of an illness?

**A:** There were definitely things that we didn't realize. He was always very conscious of others and very thoughtful and wise beyond his years. The symptoms definitely showed up senior year. He had been on the honor roll and play basketball. Then he started to struggle and stopped going to school. Something shifted. [After graduation,] Miles started to experience delusions. He was ranting about the Bible. We're not particularly religious. He started doing this really strange, long texting to his friends.

**Q:** And he started wandering around the neighborhood?Knocking on people's doors?

**A:** It was hard to get him to see anyone. He didn't think he had a problem because of his anosognosia. That's when I started to reach out to NAMI [the National Alliance on Mental Illness]. I was trying to be proactive.

**Q:** But he had already turned 18. Can you talk about how that changes everything for parents trying to get their child into treatment after they become legal adults?

**A:** It becomes pretty much impossible. He was not consenting, and there was no behavior that was so extreme that I could have him committed under the criteria that he was a danger to himself or others. Our hands were really tied.

**Q:** Can you also talk about trying to work with police?

**A:** I had multiple contacts with police to try to prevent something bad happening if someone encountered my son on the street. At some point, an officer [designated to act as a mental health liaison] came over with a social worker, a Black man, and I was very happy with that. I thought Miles might respond to him better.

**Q:** As a Black family, in a mostly white suburb, did you have added fears for Miles?

**A:** That's why I emailed all my neighbors, to say he's part of our community and he has these behaviors. But it was mostly for his safety.

**Q:** In 2018, Miles experienced symptoms of psychosis. Police came and fired bean bag rounds to subdue him, leading to an involuntary psychiatric hold. Did you find that it took something like that to finally get him into a hospital, where he was diagnosed and put on medication?

**A:** If Miles had a judge in diversion court tell him he needed to be on medication, he would have accepted it. Miles was a rule follower. There is a monthly shot he got, and it really helped him with his schizoaffective disorder. It is a gamechanger for many people with this disorder; they are able to gain insight into their illness.

**Q:** When he began to spiral again and was delusional on the day he was killed, had you been told that if you were to call police you should say he was a threat to himself or others?

**A:** It was the framing I was told we needed to say in order to get him to a hospital to get care. Even though he broke a window, he wasn't aggressive to us or to anyone. It also was in the context of having a relationship with that particular police officer, who called to let us know she was on her way. But she arrived just a few minutes too late.

**Q:** In the documentary, Gigi Crowder, CEO of NAMI's Contra Costa chapter, said a trained mental health professional might know, for example, that Miles couldn't obey officers' command to put down his gardening tool as they ordered, because he believed it was his staff of God.

**A:** Yes, if you had the right people there, this definitely wouldn't have happened. Police shouldn't be the first responders anyway, even if they have training. A lot of officers don't want to be in that

situation. A mental health emergency requires a mental health professional to respond.

**Q:** The District Attorney's Office ruled that the officers were justified because they thought Miles was a threat, while you said video shows that he was trying to run around them to get home. When you launched your foundation, what initial work did you want to focus on?

**A:** It has always been about educating the public, removing stigma and bias, and decriminalizing mental illness. We wanted to help keep other people safe to prevent what happened to us from happening to any other family or community. When it comes to interactions with police, people of color, especially those living with a mental illness, are much more likely to be killed.

**Q:** With the Miles Hall Lifeline and Suicide Prevention Act, your foundation gained a statewide profile. How does the 988 line work?

**A:** A lot of states are looking at California and AB988 as a model because of how it imposes the surcharge to provide funding. When someone calls 988, they can talk to a trained counselor who can help them work through the crisis before it gets bigger. A lot of times, they can de-escalate the crisis or call for a mobile crisis team if needed. Getting 24/7 crisis teams in every county is something that's mandated by the law and is happening across California.

**Q:** Can you also talk about organizing summits to promote mental and physical health for young Black men?

**A:** That work touches my heart. We give young Black men away to talk about the challenges they face in America. You know with Miles, he'd be out walking in Walnut Creek, and he'd see some people hold onto their purse tighter when they saw him. His race, his age, and his mental illness contributed to the misperception that he was dangerous.

**Q:** When your family was approached to share Miles' story in "No One Cares About Crazy People," you had to make the difficult decision to include the video of his killing. Why did you think it was important for people to see this?

**A:** For obvious reasons, I can't watch, but the reality of what happened is important to understand in context of what other impacted families know: Miles was the victim of a crime that day. We called because he needed help.

## **Taun Hall profile**

**Title:** Executive Director, Miles Hall Foundation

**Age:** 53

**Hometown:** San Diego; has called Walnut Creek home since 1995

**Family:** Husband Scott, daughter Alexis, and many close family members nearby

**Education:** BA San Diego State University, where I met my husband

### **Five Things About Taun Hall**

1. For Hall, community is everything. The Halls' close friends in their Walnut Creek neighborhood were among the first to stand with her and her family to seek justice for Miles. These friends continue to serve on the foundation as board members, donors, and supporters.
2. "No one wants to be part of this 'club,'" Hall said but losing a loved one to police violence has connected her to "extraordinary people": Oscar Grant's mother Wanda Johnson, uncle Cephus Johnson and aunt Beatrice Johnson of Love Not Blood; Ahmaud Arbery's mother Wanda Cooper Jones; former Congresswoman Lucy McBath; and the mothers of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner and Michael Brown.
3. The foundation has built "a strong, diverse community" through educational and fundraising events, including its annual Miles for Miles Turkey Trot and the upcoming fifth annual Play for Miles Golf Event on Sept. 14.
4. Exercise and being in nature are important for Hall's self-care, including being near the ocean or walking up and down hilly paths in Mexico.