



National Alliance on Mental Illness

The Voice

NAMI carries on legacy of Mental Health America of Allegheny County through the Adult Advocacy Program

NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania has been selected to manage Allegheny County’s adult mental health advocacy program. In addition to existing recovery-focused support, education and advocacy programs, this new initiative adds adult advocates to NAMI’s staff, who are providing direct service and support to individuals and families affected by mental illness.

NAMI was awarded the contract for this program by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services in

August 2015. Since then, adults being discharged from psychiatric care are receiving mental health adult advocacy services, training and support, including the Acute Community Support Planning (ACSP) process and coordination of a client’s Mental Health Advance Directives (MHAD) plan. In addition, the MHAD hotline was integrated into NAMI’s existing and often-used HELPLINE.

Mental Health America Allegheny County (MHAAC), a longtime provider to Allegheny County’s Mental Health program, ceased operations on Aug. 31 due to funding reductions in recent years. NAMI was then selected by Allegheny County for providing these services based on an RFP process that was completed this past summer. The mental health advocacy program will strengthen NAMI’s ability to expand its capacity for advocacy work by providing direct services to individuals and families.

“We are honored to be able to continue this adult advocacy program for Allegheny County and to carry on the highly-regarded advocacy role established by the MHA over 50 years ago,” said Christine Michaels, executive director of NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania. “This additional role for NAMI will help us to reach more people by having

“MHA set the standard for advocacy, and we intend to continue providing advocacy and meet the bar they set.”

~ Chris Michaels



in-house advocates and a combined hotline, thereby expanding our overall capability,” Ms. Michaels stated.

The type and level of services previously received through the MHAAC program remains the same. The transition in September to NAMI was seamless as clients maintained their adult advocate who has joined NAMI’s staff to serve in the same capacity. NAMI now has the necessary advocacy function to assist in the discharge process for mental health clients, which can often be complicated

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From the Desk of the Executive Director

Christine Michaels, MSHSA
Executive Director, NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania

Despite the budget impasse—Pennsylvania does not have an approved budget and human service providers are not receiving any funding (see Public Policy Updates on page 3)—I am looking forward to the new year. Up until the fall, 2015 had been a very good year for us. Please read about some of the biggest events and changes in 2015.

In our cover story, you may be learning for the first time that Mental Health America Allegheny County (MHAAC) quietly closed its doors on August 31, 2015. An RFP was issued for the Adult Mental Health Advocacy Program, and NAMI was awarded the contract. We are so honored and dedicated to have this program. Those of us who are “old-timers” value the legacy of MHA advocacy with the greatest respect and highest regard. We were able to bring the Adult Advocate, Michael McCarthy from MHAAC, to work with us at NAMI. You have the opportunity to meet Mike in our “In the Spotlight” series on page 5.

This edition of *The Voice* also features a personal story that comes from the “Tell Your Story” section of our new website that went live in July, a wrap-up article on the very successful 9th Annual NAMI Walk accompanied by some nice photos from the day, and some updates on our training and education programs.

We cannot wait to put this year behind us and get working on what is shaping up to be a very exciting and busy new year! Thank you to all our members, volunteers, supporters and donors who helped make 2015 a very productive and successful year with our support, education and advocacy activities and programs. NAMI could not do any of this without each of you! Thank you!

Happiness and Health in 2016,

Christine Michaels, MSHSA
Executive Director, NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania

NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania Mission Statement

NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania is dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families affected by mental illness through recovery focused support, education and advocacy.

Public Policy Updates

PA State Budget 2015-2016



It's December 2015, and we are into our sixth month without a state budget. School districts and many human service providers are not receiving any monthly contract funds. Mental health provider agencies are exhausting their credit lines; some are taking loans and others are laying off staff and shutting down programs.

The PA State Budget impasse is the longest in recent history and has had a crippling effect on human service providers.

We support and advocate for a budget that provides an increase in mental health funding: \$4.7 million for a 90-bed CHIP (Community Hospital Integration Projects Program), \$1.8 million for a one-third restoration of the 10 percent cuts in 2012, and \$2.5 million for a heroin and opioid addictions initiative. We also advocate that mental health services are essential services that should not be interrupted by a budget impasse.

National News

On Nov. 4, Rep. Tim Murphy's bill H.R. 2646 went to "mark-up." Mark-up is a hearing before the whole subcommittee prior to a bill moving to the full Energy and Commerce Committee (management phase) as it makes its way to the full house for a vote. The mark-up hearing proceeded for 11 hours, and more provisions were identified and discussed. The Mental Health Reform Act of 2015 S.B. 1945, considered a companion bill (positive terms versus a



"kill bill"), was introduced with bipartisan support by Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut and Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana. S.B. 1945 was "read" twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

Newly elected Speaker of the House, Paul Ryan, has provided an endorsement of H.R. 2646 and is forecasting a vote in the House in January 2016.

Both bills H.R. 2646 and S.B. 1945 are monitored closely. Many of the controversial features of H.R. 2646 are being revised and revisited. Comprehensive mental health legislation, enacted without deconstructing SAMHSA and restricting the Disability Rights Network, is desirable.

PA Dept. of Human Services (DHS) Updates



Community HealthChoices

DHS and PA Dept. of Aging are developing a new program for older Pennsylvanians and adults with physical disabilities called Community HealthChoices to provide Medicaid Long Term

Services and Supports. This system will allow individuals to receive services in their community, preserve consumer choice and allow consumers to have an active voice in the services they receive. Behavioral health services will remain under the HealthChoices carve-out.

PA DHS Receives SAMHSA Grant - *Excellence in Mental Health Act of 2014 Planning Grant*


Pennsylvania was one of 24 states to receive a one-year \$886,200 planning grant for possible participation in the demonstration program for "certified community behavioral health clinics." Only eight states will be selected to participate in a two-year pilot. NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania's Executive Director, Christine Michaels participates on the state steering committee. 🌐

NAMI carries on Legacy of Mental Health America continued from page one
or complex cases. It should be noted that the mental health children's advocacy program continues to be managed directly by the Allegheny County Office of Behavioral Health.

"We are very pleased to have a resource like NAMI to carry on our Adult Advocacy Program in Allegheny County and to be able to integrate this service into their platform for the benefit of individuals and their families," said Denise Macerelli, Deputy Director of the Allegheny County Office of Behavioral Health.

"Allegheny County is to be commended for continuing to fund advocacy services," said Laurie Barnett Levine, executive director of Mental Health America of Westmoreland County, and former Board president of MHAAC. "Allegheny

County, with the support of longtime provider Mental Health America, has a rich history of advocacy. MHA was instrumental in improving conditions in mental hospitals, closing them and bringing quality services to the community. I'm glad these services will continue through NAMI's advocacy platform," said Ms. Levine.

Each year, NAMI's HELPLINE receives more than 3,000 inquiries from people when they or a loved one is diagnosed with a mental illness and they don't know where to turn. NAMI empowers them by providing the information, resources, peer support and education on how to help a loved one, legal and housing referrals, and help in navigating the mental health system. NAMI's HELPLINE is 1(888)264-7972 and is staffed during regular business hours. 

NAMI Addresses Disparities in LGBTQ Community

Did you know that the LGBTQ population is at higher risk for mental health issues than the general population? LGBTQ individuals are also at greater risk for substance use, victimization, homelessness and poverty. And LGB youth are four more times as likely to attempt suicide than their straight peers. These disparities prompted NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania to partner with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) and PERSAD to become an LGBTQ resource in the following ways:

- NAMI has named an LGBTQ Champion among its staff to be a primary source of information and resources for the community.
- The entire NAMI staff has been trained in the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) curriculum, developed by DHS.
- NAMI has one staff person certified as a SOGIE trainer with the goal of two trainers in 2016; this means NAMI has the capacity to train other organizations and community members on this topic.

NAMI is committed to serving its members – and all residents of Southwestern Pennsylvania – in a respectful and inclusive manner. Educating the staff and community members on LGBTQ health disparities is an extension of our mission to help individuals and families affected by mental illness.



LGBTQ is an initialism that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning/Queer. The acronym has become mainstream as a self-designation, adopted by the majority of sexuality and gender identity-based community centers in the United States.



In the Spotlight...

**Mike McCarthy, Adult Mental Health Advocate,
NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania**

Why is NAMI now providing this Adult Advocacy service?

Last August, NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania was awarded a contract by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services to provide mental health adult advocacy services. NAMI was already working collaboratively with Allegheny County and Mental Health America of Allegheny County (MHAAC), a longtime provider of these services. When MHAAC ceased operations due to funding reductions, NAMI was awarded the contract and I became a part of the NAMI staff this past summer.

What is the role of an Adult Mental Health Advocate?

A mental health advocate works with individuals who have a mental health diagnosis during the discharge planning (ACSP) process. As a part of our advocacy program at NAMI, we help adult clients from Allegheny County with a range of issues they may be dealing with during this time. We make sure clients have a voice in their services ranging from housing, financial guidance and medication to other services that can help during their recovery.

What are the core components of your job?

There are three parts to my role as an adult advocate. First, I handle the ACSP process aimed at helping clients through various social services to return to a life of recovery. Second, I field inquiries from callers seeking an advocate to give them advice and answers. I also

attend meetings with individuals and treatment teams. The third part of my job is to help clients with their Mental Health Advance Directives, which aims to identify their preferences for any necessary further treatment if they are in a state of crisis.

What are your goals for helping clients?

Our goal is to ensure each person has a voice in their recovery and that they are treated fairly with rights respected. For each client, my goal is to help build a relationship that is dedicated to help that client with their own recovery. Initially, I will meet with individuals on a regular basis and will follow their progress until the ACSP process is over. Advocacy relationships with clients can last anywhere from a month to more than a year depending on how the process goes and the next level of needs. The ultimate goal is to see those affected by mental illness living in recovery and having as much of a choice in their treatment plan as possible.

What motivates you to be a passionate mental health advocate?

I get a lot of gratification from my job. It's very personal to me. My late mother and I became very experienced and passionate in advocating for my father, who lives with a mental illness. The hardest part of the job is seeing people who may not necessarily have a lot of choices in their treatment. The most exhilarating part is getting to know the individual and following them on their recovery journey. Believing in each person and supporting them as they rebuild their lives is fundamental to being an effective adult advocate.

The advocacy, education and support services provided by NAMI's staff and dedicated volunteers give hope for recovery and a future filled with promise for the estimated 600,000 people in our region who experience a mental illness each year. In the Spotlight is one way NAMI recognizes these people who so diligently work to promote improvements in our behavioral health system while championing the needs of our constituents. To nominate someone to be featured in *In the Spotlight*, please email info@namiswpa.org.



9th Annual NAMIWalks Draws Awareness and Funds for Mental Illness

A cool, fall morning greeted thousands of participants on Sunday, Oct. 4 at the Waterfront in Homestead for the 9th Annual NAMIWalks in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Blue and “stigma-free green” balloons waved high in the air as 85 teams sported team T-shirts with bright colors and inspirational messages. DJ Hinkledire’s high energy tunes – and plenty of hot chocolate and coffee from Starbucks – warmed up the walkers before they began their 5K trek along the Great Allegheny Passage.

Executive Director Chris Michaels welcomed the walkers and introduced our event leader, WALK Chair Deb Wasilchak of Community Care. In her second year as Chair, Deb led the way to raising a remarkable \$172,000 for NAMI’s mission of support, education and advocacy.

Honorary Chair Michelle Wright, news anchor at WTAE-TV, filmed pre-walk festivities live on Facebook and covered the event for the evening newscast on Channel 4 Action News. What a great way to raise awareness of mental illness treatment and recovery! Michelle led the 3.1-mile walk along the river trail right after recording artist Stevee Wellons sang a beautiful rendition of the National Anthem.

Family Team Chair Jim Ehrman came out to support the WALK and retained his title as Top Individual Fundraiser of the Year. Team Captains Libby Mascaro and Sam Kane brought Mary Lou’s Krew, a large, enthusiastic team that earned the title as #1 Fundraising Team of the Year.

People of all ages joined in the WALK festivities and helped make the morning a perfect day for spreading our message of hope and recovery. Thank you to all of the sponsors, volunteers, walkers, team captains and donors who made our 9th Annual NAMIWalks a success.

Mark your calendar for the big one in 2016:

10th Annual NAMIWalks
Sunday, Oct. 2, 2016
Waterfront, Homestead





2015 NAMI Walks Chair, Deb Wasilchak,
Community Care Behavioral Health

Top 10 Teams 2015

- Mary Lou's Krew, Team Captains Libby Mascaro & Sam Kane - \$12,329
- Community Care/Askesis, Team Captain Duncan Bruce - \$9,219
- South Hills Stampede, Team Captain Eva Bednar - \$7,295
- Jim's Jocks, Team Captain Jim Ehrman - \$4,900
- AHCI Walks for NAMI, Team Captain Lea Ann Gerkin - \$4,166
- Value Behavioral Health of PA, Team Captain Lynn Broman - \$4,130
- Fitzie's Fundraisers, Team Captain Jeff Fitzwilliam - \$3,900
- UPMC Health Plan, Team Captain Chris Wehs - \$3,104
- The Pictionary Crew, Team Captain Anne Bell - \$2,580
- Team Allegheny County DHS, Team Captain Denise Macerelli - \$2,554



Mary Lou's Krew, Top Fundraising Team 2015



Jim Ehrman, Top Individual Fundraiser
pictured with Christine Michaels

Top 5 Individual Fundraisers

- Jim Ehrman (Jim's Jocks) - \$4,900
- Libby Mascaro (Mary Lou's Krew) - \$4,524
- Deb Wasilchak (Community Care/Askesis) - \$3,880
- Ryan & Christina Casciani (Mary Lou's Krew) - \$2,325
- Eileen Lovell (South Hills Stampede) - \$2,030

Team T-shirt Winner : Family Services of Western PA



See www.namiswa.org for the
"\$1,000 Star Fundraiser Club"

2015 NAMI WALK Sponsors

Our sponsors lay the foundation for a successful walk each year. We thank them for their generosity and continued support.



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Tell your Story...

Recovery is a Process by Lizzy

My first break with reality came when I was 25.

It was the summertime, and I was a high-school teacher who had my summer off. I was severely depressed and would stay in bed all day. I was isolating, not eating, not sleeping at night, and drinking a lot of caffeine and alcohol.

I started hearing voices of the people I knew and cared for, who I thought were outside of my apartment. So, in the very early hours of the morning, I would search outside for people who weren't there.

Trying to understand what was happening, I insisted that I was "bugged," and that I had a listening device somewhere on me. In addition, I thought that the television and radio were publicly broadcasting my thoughts and giving me messages. Despite these very severe symptoms and my involuntary hospitalization, it took several doctors' visits before I was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder of the depressed type.

This led to my treatment.

The first time I experienced group therapy, I was scared to speak up about what I was hearing. I thought that there would be some horrible consequence if I did.

Thirteen years have passed since the initial onset of my symptoms in 2002 and I still continue with my therapy. Working with my doctors, I have tried a lot of different

medications over the years. I remain on them as prescribed by my psychiatrist. I know what my situational stressors or triggers are and try to stay cognizant of them so that I can maintain and monitor my wellness.

Acceptance for me was a slow uphill battle. Dealing with various symptoms of mania, paranoia and depression—in addition to hearing voices of people from my past and present—was difficult to cope with and to understand. I did return to teaching but then had to grapple with the difficult reality that the demands of that job were simply unmanageable with my current mental health symptoms. This was indeed crushing for me because being a teacher was a big part of my identity.

I was very much in denial of my illness and I railed against all of it by self-medicating with alcohol and acting out of character. Eventually, I realized that I was on a very destructive path and that I needed to change. Armed with this knowledge, I accepted myself first, the illness second, and things then began to fall into place.

I started to understand that although this is a chronic illness that I will have to manage for the rest of my life, this—like almost anything else—was something that randomly happened to me and I would not let it defeat me. I began taking better care of myself and improving on areas of my life. I'm also grateful for the help I had along the way from many sources. The help of a "village," as they say!

Currently I am a part-time peer specialist. I have held this job for the past four years. I now help others along their own recovery path. I live independently, with the help of my pet rabbit, and I feel once more that life is a journey in which I want to participate!

TELL YOUR STORY

Tell Your Story is a new section on NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania's website. The more we speak openly about mental illness, the more it encourages others to find the courage to tell their own stories.

Sharing one's personal experience helps to build greater understanding, reduce stigma and let others know they are not alone. It's one of the first steps of grassroots advocacy! We invite you to *Tell Your Story* at www.namiswa.org.

Education Corner...

Get Smart...NAMI Smarts for Advocacy training!

NAMI Southwestern PA Executive Director Chris Michaels and Associate Director Debbie Ference were selected to represent Pennsylvania at NAMI's inaugural training in Arlington, Va. on the NAMI Smarts for Advocacy program. Chris and Debbie became certified, meaning they can conduct NAMI Smarts presentations across the state, training people on effective storytelling, contacting policymakers and meeting with legislators. They can also certify other trainers to conduct NAMI Smarts presentations.

NAMI introduced a new, fourth module, **Medication: Protecting Choice**. The module discusses why medication can be a valuable tool in a person's recovery, but outlines the barriers that individuals incur in receiving the medications they need.



NAMI Smarts for Advocacy State Trainers

We also know that a medication that works well for one person may not work well for another. There is no "one size fits all" treatment for mental illness. **Medication: Protecting Choice** provides valuable information on structuring your story to effectively advocate and impact health plans, state Medicaid and insurance agencies and state and federal elected officials.

To schedule your NAMI Smarts for Advocacy training, contact the NAMI office at (412) 366-3788 or visit www.namiswa.org.

NAMI 2016 Training and Class Schedule

Feb. 20-21: Support Group Facilitator Training, Ross Twp. Looking for family members, veterans and peers who are interested in learning how to co-facilitate a NAMI Support Group. Volunteers who complete the training must commit to facilitating a NAMI support group that meets at least once a month for one year. **Application required.*

Feb. 25-26: NAMI In Our Own Voice Presenter Training, Ross Township. IOOV is a public education program in which two trained individuals share their personal stories of living with a mental health diagnosis and achieving recovery. Looking for speakers of all ages, but also targeting young adults (18-28) who are willing to tell their stories to middle and high school audiences. Trained volunteers receive stipends for scheduled presentations. **Application required.*

March 17-April 14, Thursdays, 6:30 - 9 pm: NAMI Basics. Six-week education program offered to parents and caregivers of children (3-17) who are experiencing symptoms of or diagnosed with a mental health disorder. Program offered at no cost to participants. **Registration required.*

March 2016: NAMI Family-to-Family Classes. 12-session education program for families/friends of individuals who are living with a mental health diagnosis. Class dates and locations to be announced shortly. **Classes fill quickly so contact the NAMI Southwestern PA office to be placed on the call list for the spring session.*

May 6-7: NAMI Basics Teacher Training. Prospective teachers must be parents/caregivers of a child (3-17) who exhibits symptoms and behaviors of a mental health problem. **Application required.*

June 3-5: NAMI Family-to-Family Teacher Training. Prospective teachers must be family member of individual who has a mental health diagnosis. Candidates do not need to be a graduate of the Family-to-Family program, although it is preferred. **Application required.*

*** For more information regarding programs and training opportunities or to request an application, please contact Susan Harrington at sharring@namiswa.org or call 412-366-3788.**

NAMI Support Groups...

Visit the NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania website, www.namiswa.org, and click on the "Support" link at the top of the homepage for a complete listing and meeting dates of support groups.

Allegheny County

NAMI Parent Support Group - Youth and Transition-Age East Liberty Carnegie Library, 5-7 p.m. Contact: Linda Thornhill, 412-403-9539 for more information.

NAMI Pittsburgh South - Mt. Lebanon, 3rd Wednesday of the month, 7:30-9 p.m. Contact Email: nami.south@gmail.com

NAMI Pittsburgh North - Ross Township, 1st Wednesday of the month, 7-9 p.m. Contact: Candy/Pete Venezia 412-361-8916

NAMI Pittsburgh East-FAMILIAS - Churchill, 4th Wednesday of the month, 7-9 p.m. Contact: Anne Handler 412-421-3656

NAMI Spouse Support Group - Churchill, 1st Wednesday of the month, 7-9 p.m. Contact: Mim Schwartz 412-731-4855

NAMI McKeesport - McKeesport, 1st Thursday of the month, 6:30 p.m. Contact: Violet Ludwig 412-373-7977

NAMI Western PA Borderline/Personality Disorders Family Support Group - Ross Township, 3rd Saturday of the month, 11-1 pm. Contact: Jo Burkholder 724-776-5974

NAMI W.P.I.C. Family Support Group - Oakland, 2nd Monday of the month. Contact: Sue Rudisin 412-246-5859.

Armstrong County

NAMI Armstrong County - Kittanning, 4th Thursday of the month. Contact: Family Counseling Center of Armstrong County 724-543-2941.

Beaver County

NAMI Beaver County - Rochester, 3rd Thursday of each month. Contact: Carla Braund at 724-888-6877 or email at carlabraund@namibeavercounty.com.

NAMI-C.A.R.E. (Consumers Advocating Recovery through Empowerment) - Beaver
Contact: Dr. Suzanne Vogel-Scibilia 724-775-9152

Butler County

NAMI PA Butler County - Butler MHA
Contact: Butler NAMI Office 724-431-0069

- Butler, 2nd Tuesday of the month, 7 p.m.
- Zelienople, 2nd Tuesday of the month, 6:30 p.m

Fayette County

NAMI-C.A.R.E. Fayette County
Contact: Carol Warman 724-439-1352

Indiana County

NAMI Indiana County - Third Tuesday each month, 5:30 p.m., Community Guidance Center, Contact: Autumn 724-422-4718

Lawrence County

NAMI Lawrence County
Contact: Sandi Hause 724-657-0226

Washington County

NAMI Washington County - Washington, 4th Thursday of the month, 7 p.m. Contact: Jim Gleason 724-225-1607

Westmoreland County

NAMI Alle-Kiski - New Kensington, 2nd Tuesday of the month, 7 p.m. Contact: Thad Kaminski 724-339-1339

NAMI Connection Peer Recovery Support Group - Greensburg, Tuesdays, 2:30 - 4 p.m. Contact: John (724) 853-8792

NAMI Mon Valley - Contact: Harriett Hetrick (724) 872-2186 for more information regarding the following locations:

- Monessen, 2nd Monday of the month, 7-8:30 p.m.
- Irwin, 2nd Tuesday of the month, 7-9 p.m.

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McKnight Plaza, Suite 200
Pittsburgh, PA 15237-3351

412-366-3788
1-888-264-7972

e-mail: info@namiswpa.org
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Annual dues include discounted rates for educational events, resource and referral information, newsletters, Call to Action alerts and membership in NAMI Pennsylvania and national NAMI.

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McKnight Plaza, Suite 200, Pittsburgh, PA 15237

You may also join or donate via the website at www.namiswpa.org.