



Our Mission

NAMI Mercer is a nonprofit organization of individuals and families working to improve the lives of those affected by mental illness through education, advocacy and mutual support.

NAMI Mercer Calendar

For regular support meetings, see Page 8

PUBLIC EDUCATION MEETINGS

AT THE NAMI CENTER

Jan. 21 (Tuesday)
7:30 to 9 p.m.

“Overcoming the Winter Blues” *IFSS Staff*

February: Two-Session Course in Mental Health Legal Issues

Feb 11 (Tuesday)
7:30 to 9 p.m.

“Navigating the Special Education System in NJ”
Andrew Linenberg Esq., Hinkle, Fingles & Prior Attorneys

Feb 18 (Tuesday)
7:30 to 9 p.m.

“Special Needs Trusts and Estate Planning”
Eileen Siegeltuch, Esq.

Mar. 18 (Tuesday)
7:30 to 9 p.m.

“What is PTSD and What Treatments Help?”
Speaker TBD

The Wilmots: Pillar Award Winners

Former NAMI Mercer president (1998-2002) Bill Wilmot and his wife Phyllis, both long-time volunteers and supporters, were honored with NAMI Mercer’s Pillar Award for outstanding service at Night Out With NAMI, on November 2.

Bill said, “NAMI has many visible pillars, but not one can stand without a strong, often hidden base of support. Let us remember, honor, and applaud our base: those with mental illness, who are the most deserving of all.”

Phyllis stated, “It’s often said that when one door closes another opens. For us, it happened when we walked through the door into our first Family to Family class in 1995 and were greeted by Tom and Chomy Garces. Then it was called Journey of Hope and that is exactly what it has been — with twists and turns, but always the constant NAMI connection that has sustained our family.”



IT’S TIME! Stomp out Stigma on Main Street WALK SEASON HAS BEGUN!

Our 7th annual NAMI Mercer Walk will be held on Saturday, May 17, 2014 on the grounds of Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton. On that day, we hope that thousands of like-minded people will gather to express the collective message: “Stomp out Stigma on Main Street.”

The NAMI Mercer Walk is a unique opportunity to join together in strength, friendship, and purpose to support an organization dedicated to individuals and families on their journey to wellness and recovery. Our Walk is a very special event that raises the dollars to sustain the education, outreach, and advocacy services that benefit those in greater Mercer County who face the

challenges of mental illness. Our goal is to raise \$150,000 this year.

Kicking off the 2014 Walk season at an information meeting on Nov. 19, NAMI Mercer Board member Dr. William Hayes and Development Director and Walk Manager Christine Bakter introduced this year’s “Main Street” strategy. The idea is simple. If you believe in NAMI Mercer’s mission, you can help by seeking the support of small organizations with which you routinely do business. Consider asking your doctor, dentist, mechanic, accountant, attorney, or hair salon to:

- Support the Walk at the Kilometer (\$250) or Supporter (\$500) level, or

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NAMI Mercer Introduces Parents and Teachers as Allies

In looking back, it is common for NAMI Mercer families to say, "we wish we had known sooner." When it comes to mental health concerns, we regret not having had the knowledge and wisdom to seek early treatment for our loved ones. Unfortunately, changes in behavior in children and adolescents may be subtle, and parents see some behaviors while schools may see others. With parents and teachers working together, we can intervene earlier for our young people, often preventing more serious illnesses in the future.

NAMI Mercer is addressing the need for a stronger alliance between parents and teachers by introducing a new NAMI National program: Parents and Teachers as Allies. This program is expanding across the country to educate both parents and teachers about the early warning signs of behavioral and mental disorders.

This past August and September, NAMI Mercer sponsored the training of 12 Parents and Teachers as Allies presenters by our nationally certified trainer, Suzanne Gross, who is also a NAMI Basics teacher. The presentation team includes a facilitator, an education professional (who is a family member), a mental health consumer, and a parent or caregiver of a child diagnosed with a mental illness. This panel is qualified and ready to present the two-hour Parents and Teachers as Allies class to teacher and parent groups in Mercer County.

The need for a program to ensure the emotional and social well-being of our youth is sobering. In 2011, the New Jersey Department of Education commissioned a student health survey through the Office of Student Support Services and Rutgers University. The study revealed that suicide is the third



leading cause of death among youth 15 to 19 years of age. Of the population surveyed, 26.1 percent of students stated that they "had felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two straight weeks within the past year."

The results of the 2011 health survey conclusively indicate that youth depression and suicide constitute a real concern that needs to be addressed now with accurate information and readily available resources. This same study clearly reported that the need for intervention is equal between males and females, but is higher among minority students.

NAMI Mercer appreciates and

understands the many concerns and challenges faced by families and their loved ones living with mental illness. We know the impact of diagnosis and the ups and downs of working through treatment options over time. It is in response to these needs that NAMI Mercer is bringing Parents and Teachers as Allies into our schools at no cost to the community. Thus far, we have had two pilot presentations in the Lawrence and Hamilton Public School districts. Our initial priority is to bring presentations to the middle schools of Trenton and Hamilton. NAMI Mercer has targeted these school districts that have the largest vulnerable populations.

Please be in touch with your schools to advocate for the program and also contact NAMI Mercer to request a presentation for your school community.

Best regards,

Sally Osmer

Executive Director



Sally Osmer

WALK *continued from Page 1*

- Host a "Stomp out Stigma" Sneaker Campaign at their place of business, or
- Sponsor a team at the Walk, or
- Give an in-kind donation (food or beverages for Walk day, gift certificates or product baskets to be used as prizes to motivate team captains and walkers). We will find a way to use

whatever you are able to donate.

This is an opportunity to use your passion for NAMI Mercer as a way to begin a dialogue with people who may not know what we offer. Local businesses prefer to support local organizations and events. Keep in mind that behind every business decision, there is a person making the decision.

Soliciting sponsorships is an opportunity to connect personally. People don't give to "causes" as readily as

they give to other people. As an added incentive, the value of any sponsorship you help us secure will be added to your Walk team fundraising total.

Walk sponsorship brochures, sample solicitation letters and materials for stomp walls are available for your use.

For more information on cultivating sponsorships in your community or to receive sponsorship materials, please contact **Christine Bakter** at (609) 799-8994 or cbakter@namimercer.org.

Marking a milestone: looking back and looking ahead

I hope that you have heard some of the buzz about 2014 being NAMI Mercer's 30th anniversary year. So, as I sit down to write this article for the Messenger, I've been thinking about how best to mark this milestone.

We've talked about designing a distinctive logo for our promotional materials and website, doing something special at our annual meeting, Harvest of Hope conference, and Night Out with NAMI benefit, as well as having a big anniversary party. All these ideas are good; we should celebrate being around for so many years.

At the same time, I began wondering about how we got here. Do you know our history? Thirty years ago, who had the "dedication, leadership and selflessness" to start NAMI Mercer? What were the challenges the founders faced? How did they and others develop and grow our organization to where it is today?

The phrase "dedication, leadership and selflessness" is quoted from a plaque on the wall at our office. Look for the plaque the next time you visit and read the inscribed names. They are the past presidents of NAMI Mercer. Although they are not famous like founding fathers George Washington or Thomas Jefferson, I do stand in awe of these individuals who saw a need and stepped forward to fill it.

Before NAMI existed, four families affected by mental illness began meeting regularly to provide mutual support. In the early 1980's, parents were readily blamed for their children's illnesses; stigma was a major problem; and parents had very little information and no say in treatment. That was the era of Cathy Pruden, Lois Teegarten, Judy Patterson and Dabby Palmer.

These family members became the Mercer Alliance for the Mentally Ill (MAMI was our original name), which was incorporated in 1984 with Gloria Blumenthal as the first official president. She was knowledgeable about mental health and unafraid of taking on politicians and speaking up. Her efforts were supported by advocates like Peggy Whitehead and Harold

MacDonald (sadly, now deceased).

Over time, as others like Chomy and Tom Garces joined the group, their collective energy began to spark a new phase of growth. During Chomy's presidency, NAMI Mercer started its first classes, and programs such as Just Friends were launched. Early leaders like Kay Lasley raised awareness about the need for supportive housing and negotiated all the hurdles to purchase and equip a residence that met the needs of several consumers, including her own son.

As NAMI Mercer grew, it began to operate out of office space at 88 Lakedale Drive, where the Helpline was born. Those who had worked so hard to learn the ropes were willing to share their wisdom and support with

NAMI Mercer Past Presidents

Gloria Blumenthal	1984-1986
Peggy Whitehead	1986-1987
Harold W. MacDonald	1987-1990
Cathy Pruden	1990-1992
Chomy Garces	1992-1994
Katherine Lasley	1994-1998
Bill Wilmot, PhD	1998-2002
Ellen Heath	2002-2005
Pat Demers	2005-2008
William Hayes, MD	2008-2012
Karen Marquis, PhD	2012-

others who reached out for assistance.

By the time that Phyllis and Bill Wilmot (our 2013 Pillar Award winners) found NAMI, our organization was ready for another growth spurt. During Bill's tenure, membership increased by 50 percent, a decision was made to hire a paid executive director and funds were raised, programs expanded to include Visions for Tomorrow (the predecessor of NAMI Basics), and there was an advocacy campaign in support of involuntary outpatient commitment.

Ellen Heath assumed the presidency at a pivotal moment. Despite the retirement of the Garces' and the resignation of our first executive director, Ellen worked tirelessly, expanding the

Helpline and overseeing the move to the current office. Not surprisingly, Ellen credits her success to a sturdy band of volunteers, including her successor Pat Demers. Pat's business acumen benefited NAMI Mercer greatly.

She developed our first strategic plan, led a fundraising effort that netted more than \$300,000, and, after the resignation of Jerry Lindauer, led a professional search for a new executive director, resulting in the hiring of Sally Osmer.

With a strong foundation in place, Bill Hayes was elected president. Under his leadership, NAMI Mercer expanded our professional staff, strategically adjusted our fundraising effort, grew our Board of Directors, and established a working-committee structure to drive our mission forward and ensure our sustainability. These committees, aligning to our strategic plan, distribute the work load and are quickly becoming the proving ground for our future leadership.

There have been many steps along the path from the beginnings of NAMI Mercer with just four families meeting in a living room 30 years ago. And although much credit goes to all the volunteers and patrons who have supported our organization over the years, without our visionary leaders, NAMI Mercer might have faded away instead of continuing to grow.

Thirty years from now, when a future president sits down to reflect on the past, what will he or she say about NAMI Mercer in 2014? What will be the next step in our evolution?

Sincerely,

Karen Marquis

President



Karen Marquis

New Director of Development

NAMI Mercer extends a warm welcome to Christine Bakter, who joined our staff in November 2013 as the new director of Development. We have asked Christine to introduce herself and to explain her personal connection to NAMI's mission.

I am thrilled to have the opportunity to work with NAMI Mercer as the new director of Development and would like to thank everyone who has made me feel at home.

I view my job here as an interesting blend of "old and new." Issues surrounding untreated mental illness and substance abuse in my own family spurred my interest in mental health, and I went on to earn my Bachelor's degree in psychology from the College of New Jersey. Over the course of my college years, my direction turned from clinical psychology to consumer and organizational psychology, leading me to market research in the areas of customer satisfaction and corporate reputations research.

Life changed dramatically in 2001 when my son Alex, now 15, was diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. A year later, my younger son Ben was similarly diagnosed. Any thoughts I had of returning to the paid workforce at that time were not realistic. My husband Joe and I were overwhelmed with the challenges of advocating for children with autism — in the community, in the school system, and in the medical establishment. We faced discrimination and stigma in what felt like every aspect of our lives.

One of our chief challenges was the lack of a standard medical protocol for autism; thus, we were left to our own devices when it came to school interventions and other therapies. Because autism is a brain-based disorder that impacts behavior, we quickly learned whom we could depend on and whom we couldn't. Frankly, people were fearful of what they didn't understand about the way my children behaved.

Later on, both boys were identified as having co-morbid anxiety disorders. Alex also struggles with ADHD and learning disabilities. Consequently, we

are very empathetic towards people affected by mental illness because they share the challenges faced by our family and the autism community — fear, isolation, stigma, and discrimination.

In coping with the grief of the diagnoses and related caregiver stress, I found the best therapy was being with others who faced the same challenges. I gained comfort, strength, and resilience through action. I learned about the National Alliance for Autism Research (which later became Autism Speaks) in 2002 and formed a Walk team. That first year, my family had a walk team of 40 people and raised \$5,000.

Soon I was asked to serve as the organization's Walk chair. During my three years of service, the Walk raised \$900,000.

Simply put, I love Walk events because of the sense of community they provide while serving to fund the mission of the organization. While I often felt isolated and alone during our early years with autism, coming to a Walk event with thousands of other stakeholders was a visual reminder to me that I was never alone.

To that end, I'm excited to bring my passion and ten years of volunteer leadership experience — both as a fundraiser and political advocate — to NAMI Mercer as your director of Development. I'm grateful to have an opportunity to help NAMI Mercer forward its mission to improve the lives of those affected by mental illness through education, advocacy, and support.

I'm looking forward to helping you grow the Walk program by providing leadership in team building, sponsorship cultivation, and community outreach, and making the 2014 Walk the best yet!



Christine Bakter

ADA ACCOMMODATIONS WORTH THE HASSLE?

By Elisabeth Flinsch

This article appeared in the Daily Targum, Rutgers U., Nov. 6, 2013. Reprinted by permission.

Midterms — not everyone's favorite part of a semester, but for some, these exams can cause intense feelings of anxiety that actually affect their ability to take tests. I am one of these people.

I have an anxiety disorder. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I am entitled to receive accommodations on my exams to level the playing field for all students. Common accommodations include extra time, use of a calculator, and a separate place to take the tests away from distractions.

Every semester, in addition to reading, studying, working on projects, trying to meet deadlines, and everything else a busy student has to do, I have the added hassle of trying to secure my accommodations.

This process includes reaching out to professors and having them sign my letter of accommodation, returning the letter to Disability Services, making deadlines for exam accommodation requests, and reaching out to my coordinator for additional support.

Each term, I worry over presenting the forms to my professors and wonder if they will look at me differently. I don't use my accommodations for every class, only for those that require me to take a multiple-choice exam in a room with hundreds of others and the clock ticking away.

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Elisabeth Flinsch is a junior at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, majoring in women's and gender studies with a minor in cultural anthropology. Having been involved with NAMI Mercer as a child, she wants to combine her area of specialization with her interest in reducing stigma and advocating for marginalized people with disabilities and brain disorders. She hopes to teach at the college level.

Harvest of Hope, October 2013



Top left: Cantor Kim Komrad and Dr. Mark Komrad. Top right: Kathy Puca (standing) and Erica Silver. Middle left: Bonnie Tomlin and Bernie Gross. Left: Tricia Baker and Miki. Above: Sandra Smedley and Sally Osmer.

It's About Time . . . For Mental Health Parity

By Joyce Campbell

Fifty years ago, President John F. Kennedy signed the Community Mental Health Act, transforming the care of persons with mental illness.

This past November, President Obama took another significant step forward by delivering the final rules on the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equality Act (MHPAEA). Although this act was signed into law in 2008, its interim provisions had been unclear, leaving the door open for insurers to continue to discriminate by charging higher out-of-pocket costs and imposing stricter limits on medical visits for mental illness than for physical illness.

The timing of President Obama's MHPAEA implementation rules is very important. William Waldman wrote in the October edition of the Rutgers School of Social Work newsletter, "...given the implementation of the Affordable Care Act and New Jersey's plan to move such services into the framework of managed care, we are on the cusp of transformational change in how behavioral health services are organized, financed, and delivered."

According to the final ruling on the

MHPAEA, insurance companies must provide coverage for mental health and substance abuse issues at the same cost as for physical conditions. People cannot be denied coverage based on mental health and addiction histories, and the time limits for mental health and substance abuse rehabilitation hospital stays must be no different than those for victims of heart attacks or other physical conditions. The Affordable Care Act, which designates mental health services as mandatory benefits of each plan in the Health Insurance Marketplace (Exchange), should help to ensure the enforcement of the newly released rules. Furthermore, while the MHPAEA applies to large group plans, the Affordable Care Act extends the parity protections for those participating in individual and small group health insurance plans.

Parity brings with it the hope that stigma regarding mental illness will be dramatically reduced. With greater access and reimbursement for services, we hope that more people suffering with mental health and substance abuse issues will seek help. Parity regulations send a clear message that mental and physical health problems

are both real and need to be treated with equal attention.

While advocates for mental health parity are celebrating this tremendous victory, some concerns remain. Many wonder if there will be enough providers to meet the increased demand for help.

Perhaps the greatest concern is that the regulations don't cover managed care plans through Medicaid or the State Children's Health Insurance Program, representing 15 percent of Americans covered by health insurance. NAMI Executive Director Michael Fitzpatrick stated in a Star Ledger article on Nov. 11, 2013, "Some of our most vulnerable people are still being left behind." However, since so many gains have been made in New Jersey throughout the years thanks to the work of tireless advocates, there is no doubt that these advocates will speak up loud and clear if true parity is not implemented. For now, we should celebrate this major victory and keep on stomping out stigma. One day we will be able to retire our sneakers!

Joyce Campbell is a member of the NAMI Mercer Board of Directors.

ADA ACCOMMODATIONS

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However, just getting my accommodations in order causes me stress and anxiety. Sometimes, my emails don't get answered or my records get messed up. I receive conflicting information, and I stress about where and when my exam will be scheduled, how I will get there, and whether it conflicts with any prior commitments.

I recently decided to post a rant on my Facebook page about how hard and anxiety-inducing it is to actually secure accommodations. Imagine my surprise to receive around 20 comments posted on it; six people private messaged me instead of replying to my post.

Over and over again, I heard similar stories. Some people do not even both-

er to go through the hassle of securing their accommodations because it causes too much stress. Some people shared my concerns that people would think less of me after reading my post. Others expressed fears of being stigmatized by their peers and professors. I began to speak with my friends and classmates and learned that they shared the same sentiments.

Which brings me to a sad conclusion — mental illness, brain disorders, and disabilities are more in the closet than even LGBTQ issues. It made me wonder how it was possible for so many people to think they were alone in their struggle, and that it wasn't even worth it to pursue their rights granted by law. Why is a system that is supposed to help reduce anxiety causing so much anxiety?

Obviously, this is something we must all think about. I didn't ask to

have an anxiety disorder, no more than someone diagnosed with cancer asked for it. Why should my disease be stigmatized and hushed up more than somebody with cancer?

My ability to advocate for myself is what has enabled me to get as far and do as well as I have. Unfortunately, so many people suffer needlessly, not understanding the law or the protections and help available to them.

In writing this, I hope to reach out to people like me and let them know that they are not alone.

I hope to spread the message that there are many of us out there, and that it is not okay to call someone else or even yourself "crazy," "schizo," "retard," "OCD," "bipolar," etc. Doing so only silences those who are already marginalized by society and perpetuates stigma.

NAMI Mercer

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THE NAMI CENTER

of Mercer County

Lawrence Commons,
3371 Brunswick Pike, Suite 124
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

(609) 799-8994

home@namimercer.org
www.namimercer.org

Night Out With NAMI, Nov. 2

Old and New Friends Gather to Celebrate



From left: former NAMI Mercer president Chomy Garces (1992-1994), Evelyn Macfarlane, Bob Demers and Duncan Macfarlane enjoy the evening at Stuart Country Day School. Over 160 people attended Night Out 2013, and the benefit raised more than \$65,000 for the organization. Guests enjoyed a splendid reception with a silent auction, a delicious dinner with a live auction featuring Board member Jeremy Mann as auctioneer, and a soulful concert by Wenonah Brooks concluding the evening.

February is Membership Month!

In 2013, NAMI Mercer grew in strength and productivity with the support of 440 member households whose collective influence enabled us to carry out our mission. As we begin our 2014 membership campaign, can we count on you to make a commitment to families affected by mental illness by renewing your membership or joining for the first time?

By joining, you will receive:

- Education and support on mental health topics that promote recovery.
- Up-to-date information on policy, research, and news affecting people with mental illness and their families.
- Enhanced capacity to handle difficult situations via NAMI Connection.
- The following publications: The NAMI National Advocate, The NAMI New Jersey Alliance and The NAMI Mercer Messenger.

The right to vote to elect NAMI Mercer's Board of Directors and representatives on state and national boards.

Joining and renewing are easy at namimercer.org/support/join.shtml. Or, call (609) 799-8994 for a registration form. Annual membership is \$35 for an individual/family or \$3 if you have limited income.

NAMI Mercer is a membership organization that emphasizes the quality of relationships, community building, and opportunities to connect with other members. Your voice, added to hundreds of others, will make a huge difference as we advocate for better services and policies for people with mental illness.

Help us tip the balance toward a more compassionate society that promotes recovery.

SAVE THE DATE!

NAMI Mercer WALK – May 17, 2014
ETS, Princeton, NJ

Kickoff Luncheon – March 13, 2014
Janssen, Titusville, NJ

Register for the WALK at
namiwalks.org/mercercounty
(609) 799-8994



NAMI Mercer Groups

Support Groups:

NAMI Connection Support Group: Recovery support group program for people living with mental illness. Second and fourth Tuesdays, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. This group is open to anyone with a mental illness, no registration required. NAMI Center. Call us for more information.

IFSS/NAMI: Support for families of adults with mental illness. Mondays, 5:15 – 6:45 p.m., at Lawrence Rd. Presbyterian Church. Tuesdays, 5:15 – 6:45 p.m. at NAMI Mercer, and Thursdays, 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Kingsbury Towers, 1 Kingsbury Sq., Trenton.

Education Classes:

WRAP: An eight-session Wellness and Recovery Action Plan program for people living with mental illness. New classes start in March at the NAMI Center.

Family to Family: Two classes of Family to Family will start in February. This is a 12-week class for family members of adults who have mental illness.

NAMI Basics, a six-week class for parents or caregivers of children and adolescents with behavioral or emotional challenges. The new semester starts in March.

All NAMI Mercer support groups and classes are free, but registration is required for classes. Contact us by phone or email to inquire about the classes.

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