

Our Mission

NAMI Mercer listens, leads, educates, and advocates, helping families and individuals affected by mental illness to build better lives, free of stigma and discrimination.

February is Membership Month

We are who we are because you are who you are! When we join together, we exert a collective influence that makes the quality of life in Mercer County and beyond significantly better for the many individuals and families living with mental illness.

As we launch our 2018 membership campaign, can we count on you to renew your membership or join us for the first time, making NAMI Mercer and our community “stronger than stigma” and an undeniable force for good?

As a member, you have access to programs and services that promote recovery and mental wellbeing and up-to-date information on policy, research, and news. You will receive the following publications: The NAMI National Advocate, The NAMI New Jersey Alliance, and The NAMI Mercer Messenger.

In addition, membership will help you build supportive relationships and enhance your capacity to handle difficult situations. You will have a vote in the organization’s annual election of Board members at the local, state, and national levels.

You can join or renew your membership online at namimercer.org. Or, complete and mail the form on Page 10.

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NAMIWalks at ETS – Sunday, May 6

by Christine Bakter

Sleep in and then take an afternoon stroll at the 2018 NAMIWalks Mercer County this spring! We are pleased to announce that the 11th annual NAMI-Walks event, hosted by NAMI Mercer, will be held on Sunday, May 6, at Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton.

Since ETS no longer supports events on Saturdays, our NAMIWalks event will take place on Sunday, with registration beginning at 11:30 am and a 1:00 pm Walk start time.

Proceeds from the event sustain the education and support programs offered at no cost to families and individuals affected by mental illness in the NJ Capital Region.

This year’s theme, “Freedom from Stigma,” was suggested by NAMI Mercer committee member Stephanie Kammer. In keeping with the NAMI hashtag of “IamStigmaFree,” participants are encouraged to express what freedom means to them.

Along with our annual team T-shirt contest, the committee is working on a theme-related competition that will be announced at the Walk Kickoff on Tuesday, March 13 at 6:00 pm at Janssen Pharmaceuticals in Titusville. In addition to free refreshments, entertainment and our wellness fair, participants can learn



Trenton Thunder mascot Boomer and Mercer County Freeholder Andrew Koontz, surrounded by local royalty: (l to r) Salonna, Angelique, Zena, Alicia, Tiffany, Malak and Stephanie at the 2017 NAMIWalks Mercer County at Educational Testing Service.

more about NAMI Mercer’s program offerings through our poster presentation launched at Night Out with NAMI.

Robbinsville Councilman and NAMI Mercer Board Member Dan Schuberth is leading our effort as volunteer walk chair. Last year, he led NAMI Mercer’s first community walk team, comprising more than 50 Robbinsville walkers who raised approximately \$12,000.

The team’s efforts were bolstered by a proclamation recognizing May as Mental Health Awareness Month throughout the township.

The NAMIWalks website is open, and the corporate sponsorship drive is underway. Participants may sign up online at www.namiwalks.org/mercercounty or request a corporate sponsorship brochure by contacting Walk Manager Christine Bakter at 609.799.8994 x13 or emailing walk@namimercer.org.

SAVE-THE-DATE

We Love Our Volunteers Celebration

Monday, February 12, 5–7 pm

NAMI Mercer Center

RSVP to home@namimercer.org



Executive Director's Message

Ending the Silence

Stigma and discrimination often stand in the way of people getting the help they need, whatever their vulnerabilities.

Those affected by mental illness know this only too well, frequently suffering in silence, not seeking treatment or asking for support because they fear the negative consequences of disclosing mental health challenges. The cost of such silence is high — limiting quality of life — sometimes, resulting in the devastating loss of a life!

Sadly, we know this to be true in our local community. Several recent deaths by suicide have called us to action, mobilizing us to work together on raising awareness, transforming attitudes, and increasing access to hope.

NAMI Mercer is pleased to be collaborating with other community leaders, specifically the superintendent of the Hamilton School District, Dr. Scott Rocco, to change the narrative about mental health in the New Jersey Capital area. As part of this effort, we will launch NAMI's new signature program, Ending the Silence (ETS).

Originally conceived as an early intervention program to engage middle-school and high school students in meaningful conversation about mental health, ETS is now being expanded to address families, as well as school personnel (replacing the Parents & Teachers As Allies program), ETS offers a message of hope intended to diminish stigma and discrimination.

NAMI's Ending the Silence was developed by Brenda and Brian

Hilligoss with NAMI DuPage County, Illinois. Through partnerships with other NAMI affiliates, the program had reached over 60,000 students by mid-2013 when NAMI DuPage gifted ETS to NAMI National for technical support and oversight.

Since that time, ETS for students has expanded to 27 states, reaching more than 52,000 annually.

Grounded in the validity of lived experience, this program is considered highly effective. Presenters share their stories and utilize educational slides and videos to spark open discussion about mental health issues.

This is how change begins — by normalizing what has long been misunderstood and challenging the notion that a mental health condition is an insurmountable obstacle to living a full and productive life.

This past June, former Second Lady of the United States Tipper Gore generously presented NAMI National with a \$1 million gift for the expansion of ETS.

Since that announcement, the NAMI Education team and NAMI ETS experts across the nation have been working hard to prepare for the rollout.

In addition to updated ETS materials, presenter training will now occur online with an in-person practice session. It takes leadership and courage for those who have been silent to find

cating for better policies and services for individuals and families affected by mental illness. Help us tip the balance in favor of a more compassionate society that promotes mental health. Do your part and become a member of NAMI Mercer today!



Standing (l to r) author and former Second Lady Tipper Gore, NAMI National Executive Director Mary Giliberti. Seated (l to r) NAMI Mercer Executive Director Janet Haag and NAMI National Chief Operating Officer Cheri Villa at the Executive Directors' Leadership Exchange on Oct. 19, 2017, in Alexandria, VA.

their voices and come out of the shadows into the light.

As Danny Gibbs, an ETS presenter, noted, "We understand the hurt and anguish like no other and have earned the authority to portray hope as more than a concept. To us, hope is a way of life that does not minimize our pain nor give power to it."

NAMI Mercer is proud to be among the first round of NAMI affiliates committed to Ending the Silence—opening the way to greater health and hope!

Janet Haag

Executive Director

Membership Month

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At NAMI Mercer we are all about community, emphasizing caring relationships and inviting people to share their gifts and talents, to add their voices to hundreds of others in advo-

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." Helen Keller



President's Message

2018 is the year of advocacy

In your own way, decide to make 2018 a year of advocacy. According to Webster, advocacy is defined as “the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal.” This definition is broad enough to give you significant latitude to advocate within your own comfort level.



Jason Redd

For me, advocacy means never missing an opportunity to discuss mental health and NAMI in person or on social media. This includes sharing positive stories about NAMI's impact on individuals with mental illness and their families. It means speaking up whenever possible to dispel stigma and create a safe environment for individuals to talk about their experiences and to seek help. I am successful even if I help one individual or family member.

Additionally, my advocacy also involves using my voice to raise money for NAMI because I believe in our mission. I educate people about what we offer and invite them to join us at activities, including our walk, our many educational programs, and our fundraising events.

Whatever your definition of advocacy, I encourage you to make a conscious effort to become an activist supporting individuals with mental illness and their families. Together we can create a chorus of calls that will move us closer to ending stigma.

Jason Redd
President

NAMI Mercer Joins Countywide Campaign to End Student Suicides



NAMI Mercer staff offers information at suicide-prevention meeting on Jan. 9.

NAMI Mercer responded to a “Call for Action” by Mercer County school superintendents to address an alarming trend. During the last 20 months, there have been seven confirmed suicides of young people in the county. Suicide remains the third leading cause of death for ages 10-24 in NJ.

NAMI Mercer joined nearly 700 parents, community members, educational professionals, and like-minded non-profits at a rally on Jan. 9 from 7-9 pm at Rider University. The evening served as a first step in raising a countywide focus on mental health. “Nonprofits and groups

introduced Dr. George Scott, the Traumatic Loss Coalition's statewide resource coordinator, who was the main speaker. According to Scott, attempted suicide is “a public health issue.” He continued: “It is a topic filled with shame and embarrassment . . . Failing to talk about suicide makes matters worse. We need to talk about it.”

At the conclusion of the meeting, Lawrence Superintendent Dr. Crystal M. Edwards said “We are in a battle today to keep our children. Let's work together.”

including the National Alliance on Mental Illness have reached out to offer help and potential programming for students,” said Superintendent. David Aderhold of West-Windsor-Plainsboro, who delivered opening remarks at the Jan. 9 meeting.

The superintendent then

There was a reason I suffered

By Ayesha Karim

The reason for all of my suffering will be revealed in time.

In the future, the reason will be illuminated. And we'll all say “oh this was the reason Ayesha suffered for over twenty years with schizophrenia.”

It won't be so bad.

By then I'll probably have published two chapbooks of my own poetry and my SZ memoir I call Ayesha's Story: *The Schizophrenia Memoirs*.

My memoir needs to be 60,000 words to be a book said my memoir teacher. That's my goal — to have 60,000 words or thereabouts. I have done so much writing about myself and my illness that I feel good about where I am in my life right now.

I have my NAMI Parents & Teachers as Allies presentation notes that I published last February. And all of the volunteer work I do at NAMI Mercer NJ and even this new poem in the January 2018 NAMI Mercer newsletter.



Volunteers at work

By Leslie Handler

What do NAMI volunteers do? Why do NAMI's helpline cards say "You are not alone?" You're about to find out.

NAMI volunteers Tom Pyle and Jerome Kidd recently assisted in a call for help from a letter received in the NAMI Mercer office. The letter was from Dominic Bovio, inmate at Northern State Prison, who suffers from issues with addiction, and both physical and mental disabilities. Jerome fielded the request for assistance with Dominic's release date, connected Dominic to the appropriate resources, and considered his job complete. But a follow-up letter was received from Dominic stating that he needed further assistance. That's when Jerome got Tom involved. Both volunteers knew that the key issue for Dominic was to nail down housing prior to any other issues Dominic would have to face.

Customarily, prisoners need a completed discharge plan sixty days prior to their release date, but no such plan was in place for Dominic. His case kept getting bumped from one person and department to another with no clear plan solidified. He was to be released with the clothes on his back and a list of addresses to area shelters. Knowing that this "no plan, plan" was about the worst situation for Dominic's success, this dynamic duo went to work. They arranged to obtain releases from Dominic giving them authority to advocate on his behalf. They met with Dominic and staff at the prison to assist in getting Dominic on the right path to re-enter society.

The volunteer team contacted Oaks Integrated Care for assistance, when they found a bit of a road block. Oaks required Dominic to already be out of prison prior to their accepting him into their program. This was a Catch-22, as Dominic needed housing prior to his release! The volunteers then discovered the Juvenile and Adult Re-entry Connections program. Between the two programs, Tom and Jerome worked closely with Dominic to find the right place for him to land.

Unfortunately, Dominic received his release date prior



From left: Tom Pyle and Jerome Kidd at work in NAMI Mercer's Wolfe education room.

to the confirmation of housing. He managed to find an affordable hotel for his first night out of prison. Within twelve hours of his release, Tom and Jerome were there to meet him and offer their support. They have continued to work with him, support him and advocate for him.

Through his introduction from Tom and Jerome, Dominic is expected to enter into Oaks Integrated Care in January. Tom has done everything from assisting Dominic with his apartment application paperwork to giving him rides to pick up his medication. Jerome speaks and texts with Dominic regularly to offer support. One of Jerome's recent emails to Dominic reminded him that "you are not alone." On December 22nd, the Friday before Christmas, Tom and Jerome were making calls on Dominic's behalf to follow up on the status of his plan for further assistance.

In navigating a frequently dysfunctional system to find assistance for those touched by mental illness, NAMI volunteers know how to step up to the plate. They can't be social workers, but they can be advocates. They can assist.

What do NAMI volunteers do? They go the extra mile to advocate for those who reach out for help. They follow up to ensure success. They help educate those in need of assistance as well as the public, and they respect all people without discrimination, because they want each individual to know what we know — you are not alone!

NAMI Mercer to participate in Community Day Program at The Lawrenceville School

NAMI Mercer has been invited to present at The Lawrenceville School Community Day Program on February 1. The theme of the program is "Liberty and Justice for All: Fulfilling the Promises of the American Dream."

Participants will explore how the American Dream plays out in the major societal institutions in America, including the Healthcare system—

specifically, access and equity to mental healthcare. NAMI Mercer volunteers Leslie Handler, Mindy Hoffman, Jerome Kidd, and Tom Pyle will be panelists during a two-hour workshop for students, faculty, and staff.

Executive Director Janet Haag will facilitate a discussion that will touch on everything from the effects of stigma on access to treatment to the resiliency that enables people to re-

shape their dreams and achieve their full potential.

Presenting this workshop at The Lawrenceville School is yet another way NAMI Mercer is building relationships and expanding our impact within the community, promoting better mental health, deeper understanding, and greater hope for the future.

NAMI Mercer earns two grant awards

By Christine Bakter
Director of Development

for NAMI Mercer in New
Jersey.

NAMI Mercer is pleased to share news of two grant awards in December 2017.

Church and Dwight Inc.

The Church and Dwight Employee Giving Fund (EGF) made a \$7,000 award in support of NAMI Mercer programs, including Family-to-Family, In Our Own Voice, Parents & Teachers as Allies, and public education presentations. Established in 2005, the EGF is a workplace program administered by a Grants Committee comprising Church and Dwight employees who work in the Princeton and Ewing facilities

NAMI Mercer's proposal was bolstered by an employee recommendation from Will Laohoo of the Church and Dwight accounting department in Ewing. Will wrote:

I am part of a national organization (fraternity) whose cause is mental health. We have partnered with NAMI nationally and locally. My fraternity worked primarily with NAMI in Maryland, but our membership throughout the nation participates in NAMIWalks everywhere, including New Jersey.

I had the opportunity to hear Sally Osmer tell her story and involvement with NAMI Mercer a few years ago at one of our town hall meetings, and it left me inspired. These are just a few reasons why I continue to be an employee sponsor

Lawrence Township Community Foundation (LTCF)

The LTCF granted \$2,500 in support of NAMI Mercer's Family-to-Family education program. Director of Operations Danita Saunders-Davis accepted the award on December 14, 2017, from Elizabeth Read, LTCF board member and NAMI Mercer's "grant buddy."

Family-to-Family is a NAMI National signature program, created in 1991 by psychologist and family member, Dr. Joyce Burland. The 12-session course offers insights on the impact of mental health conditions on the entire family. Since NAMI Mercer began offering Family-to-Family in 1995, 635 families have participated in and benefitted from the program.

In May 2013, NAMI Family-to-Family was listed on the National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP). Scientific evaluation showed that course participants had improved family empowerment, family functioning, engagement in self-care activities, mental health knowledge, and emotional acceptance.



NAMI Mercer Director of Operations Danita Saunders-Davis accepts grant award from Elizabeth Read, Lawrence Township Community Foundation Board member.

NAMI Mercer's proposal included the following statement from Caryl Chambers, one of last year's facilitators:

Through Family-to-Family, I have learned (and I now teach others) that our mentally afflicted family members will do far better as we keep our own lives on track and do not burden them with the additional pain of watching us in despair. But at the same time, through Family-to-Family, I know that our mentally afflicted family members need our involvement in their lives and our guidance in facing challenges as new to them as they are to us. The last thing they need is abandonment by their best source of help – their family!

Fundraising events raise more than \$60K

Night Out with NAMI was a double feature in 2017 with a concert at the Pennington School and a dinner/dance at the Windsor Athletic Club gymnasium.

On Oct. 8, Tanya Gabrielian, a world-renowned classical pianist, captivated the audience with her brilliant performance. On Nov. 4, attendees enjoyed a 1950s/1960s "sock hop" complete with dinner, dancing to rock 'n roll music, and games. The two events brought in more than \$60,000 in support of NAMI Mercer.



Above: Carol and John Marsland with pianist Tanya Gabrielian at the benefit concert. At right: (l to r) Maddy Monheit, Sami Silver, and Jacki Chadwick in 1950s' attire at Night Out with NAMI in November.



New Oversight for the Division of Mental Health Services

By Tom Pyle

For the past few years, New Jersey's community mental health system has experienced enormous changes. First, there was the attempt to migrate our system's service agencies from a contract-based payment system to a more independent managed-care system. Then came the Affordable Care Act, with its new mandate and newly insured (but no new providers).

More recently the opioid addiction crisis prompted Governor Christie to declare a public health emergency. Unfortunately, the redirection of attention and resources to this crisis is pinching social services for those with traditional, serious, and persistent mental illnesses.

The latest challenge is the State's decision to change oversight of the New Jersey Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMAHS, also known as "The Division"). For decades, DMHAS has been under the purview of the New Jersey Department of Human Services, which also oversees

the NJ Medicaid System and other allied services important to loved ones with mental illness. As of October 1, 2017, the Division now resides under the supervision of the New Jersey Department of Health (DoH), which is the state's institution regulating hospitals.

The logic of the Division's relocation to the DoH may be to connect better the services of hospital care and community care, the long-standing goal of so-called "integrated behavioral health care." Another reason is to increase the focus of state resources for addressing the opioid addiction crisis itself, with its increasing need for more detoxification and intensive rehabilitation services, often conducted in medical settings.

Nevertheless the Division's relocation to the DoH has prompted anxiety among loved ones and families navigating the maelstrom of mental illness. Many are concerned that the move marks a retreat from the philosophy of the self-directed community-based "recovery model" of care (also

known as "psychiatric rehabilitation") to a more retrograde, corporate-based "medical model." Affected families fear that this move will unduly increase the influence of hospitals in the management of mental illness. Primary among these concerns is the likely increased emphasis on medications as the solution for mental illness and the reduced emphasis on necessary social assistance such as supportive housing, education, and employment.

As was written during our American Revolution, the same can be said about our state's current community mental healthcare system: "These are times that try men's souls." All families and loved ones must now prepare to navigate potentially more treacherous waters. NAMI Mercer will continue to follow these developments.

Tom Pyle, a member of the NAMI Mercer Board for the past six years, holds an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School and an M.S. in Psychiatric Rehabilitation from Rutgers University.

New Hearing Voices Support Group

By Tom Pyle

Do you hear voices? If you do, you are not alone. More than 25 percent of all persons with serious mental illness experience auditory hallucinations.

For some, the presence of such voices can be a distraction; for others they can be a torment. Critical, harsh, apocalyptic, and commanding voices can overwhelm a loved one to the point of despair, disrupting work efforts, home life and personal peace. Some voices can provoke dangerous behaviors.

Seeking help with one's voices can be highly problematic. Those with mental illness already suffer significant social stigma.

Those who also hear voices bear a

compounded stigma. Admitting to hearing voices can trigger the worst possible stigma and prejudice of one's situation, especially among medical professionals, but even among loved ones.

Medications are often the first line of defense against unwanted voices. Although medications sometimes quell the voices, they can have very negative side effects, including lethargy, akathisia, weight gain, and metabolic syndrome. Psychotherapy is another treatment modality, but often is not very effective.

What to do? A new movement has arrived in the United States, and NAMI Mercer is partaking of it. Started in Holland and expanded in the United Kingdom, this movement

is called the Hearing Voices Network (HVN). The HVN promotes self-help among voice-hearers, based on the integrity and dignity of all individuals participating in their HVN self-help groups. With peer leadership and training, the movement's objective is to help voice hearers better negotiate, live with and even talk back to their voices.

Last September, NAMI Mercer started its own Hearing Voices Support Group. Facilitated by Laurie Goldman, a trained peer specialist, and Tom Pyle, NAMI Mercer board member, the Hearing Voices Support Group meets weekly at the NAMI Mercer Center. The group is totally confidential and peer-driven. New members are welcome.

Reflections on My Presentation to NJ Probation Officers

By Akavar Dylutra

I have done many speaking engagements for NAMI Mercer over the years, finding it helpful to tell my own story of illness and recovery. When Janet Haag received a request from the New Jersey Office of Probation Services for a presentation to 125 probation officers and managers, I looked forward to the opportunity to speak to a new audience.

The time slot for my presentation at the Robert Wood Johnson Health and Wellness Center in Hamilton was to be on Friday afternoon, November 3. As I exchanged phone calls with my host, Siobhan Fay, my assignment became clear.

First, the Office of Probation Services was very interested in educating its officers and managers about mental health. My role was to tell my story of illness and recovery. The presenters immediately preceding me were going to talk about the statewide screening centers and different aspects of the voluntary/involuntary commitment process.

On the assigned day, I started my presentation at about 3:00 pm, telling the audience that they could interrupt me at any time with comments or questions. After about five minutes of my telling my story, the audience began the dialog. I usually mention that I had some very serious self-harming behavior by the time I was five years old. This intrigued the audience, so we discussed what the behaviors were, how I forgot about them for many years, and then remembered them as I was working my way through my recovery.

Another topic that we discussed at length was my forty years of substance abuse. We talked about the fact that for many years, I did not recognize that I had a problem because I came from a family in which everyone, with no excep-

tions, was a functioning alcoholic. We also talked about how many people who begin abusing substances early in life enter young adulthood thinking that "this is who I am."

As we continued, a member of the audience inquired how to talk to a family member who does not think that he or she has an illness. This is a common situation. I responded as best I could, but wound up having a private conversation with the probation officer after the presentation.

When I worked in the entertainment industry, if there were a two-day event, the prime spot was the last act of the last day. However, I did not think this would be the case for a two-day departmental training. I figured that everyone would want to leave before traffic got too heavy, not to mention to start their weekend a few hours early.

It turned out that this assessment was correct. At about 3:30 pm, it seemed like a switch was thrown. I began to see in the faces of the attendees that all they wanted to do was finish with the day and go home. This was fine with me. I had made my major points, I had found another organization to collaborate with NAMI Mercer for future events, and I ended the presentation before the audience was annoyed with me.

After the presentation I talked individually with two different people. Many times, I will trigger questions that people do not even realize they have. The discussions after a presentation can be as important as the presentation itself.

I have already mentioned the one individual who wanted to talk about his



family member. That conversation lasted about twenty minutes. Another individual wanted to talk about many other issues. We conversed about another half an hour. In the end, I wound up speaking well beyond my scheduled time. It's just that the second part of the presentation was much more personal than the first.

For me, this was a typical speaking engagement. It never goes the way you think it will. You never speak about all the things you plan to speak about. There is usually at least one person who wants to talk to you afterward. In my opinion, this is what NAMI Mercer does. We get out into our community, and we share our experience with mental illness. We show our fellow New Jerseyans that they are not alone and that there is at least one organization in the community that understands and can help them with their challenges related to mental illness within their family.

I look forward to my next opportunity to represent NAMI Mercer in our community.

Judge Irenas Receives Posthumous Honor

The U.S. District Court of New Jersey paid tribute to the late Judge Irenas on November 14, 2017, by naming a conference room at the Camden Courthouse in his memory: The Honorable Joseph E. Irenas Attorney Conference Room.

Nominated to the federal court by President George Bush in 1991, Judge Irenas served from 1992 until his death in 2015. He was a member of the NAMI Mercer Board from 2007 to 2015 and a recipient of the prestigious Pillar Award in 2012.

NAMI Mercer's Open House in Hamilton, December 6, 2017

NAMI Mercer dedicated a "Giving Tree" during our Open House in December. The tree was donated by the Baranowski Family in memory of their daughter Judy, who passed away on January 28, 2016, at the young age of 26.

"Judy was such a genuinely kind, caring and loving person," recalls her cousin Jerilyn Angotti, treasurer of the NAMI Mercer Board. "She thought of others before herself at all times."

Judy lived in Lawrenceville her entire life, graduated from Lawrence High School in 2007 and Rider in 2011. At the time of her passing, Judy was a lead preschool teacher at the Stokes School in Trenton. Teaching and working with young children was her greatest passion. She had a way with children, and they seemed to gravitate toward her warm smile.



(l to r) Walt Baranowski, Jackie Baranowski, Jerilyn Angotti and Christine Bakter.

By donating the tree, Judy's parents, Walter and Jackie Baranowski, hope to bolster the long-term sustainability of NAMI Mercer. The tree is a means to recognize significant gifts to the Fund for the Future through the inscription of leaves.

There are two ways to earn a leaf:

1) A single, one-time gift of \$500 (bronze leaf), \$1,000 (silver leaf), or \$2,500 (gold leaf) to memorialize or honor the person(s) chosen by the donor. Legacy gifts given through estate plans and gifts of stock also will qualify.

2) A personalized memorial or honorary tribute campaign of multiple

gifts from multiple donors during one calendar year (Jan.-Dec.) totaling \$500 (bronze leaf), \$1,000 (silver leaf), or \$2,500 (gold leaf). Engraving of the leaves will occur on a quarterly basis. Contact **Christine Bakter** at cbakter@namimercer.org or 609.799.8994 Ext. 13.

The Giving Tree

With each leaf upon this tree,
Forged with elements from the earth,
May we all together form
The crown of courage for new birth.
May we, too, reach for the stars
With firm resolve and artful grace.
May our roots hold firm the ground.
May we the winds of change embrace.
May we prosper with this tree,
A strong symbol of our task.
This in humble thankfulness,
For all we have and are, we ask.

Anonymous

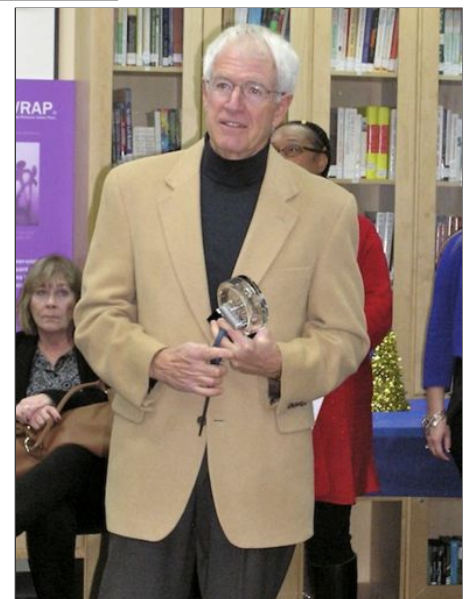


Ribbon Cutting

After 16 years at its Lawrence Commons location, NAMI Mercer officially inaugurated its new office center in Hamilton on December 6, 2017, with help from Mayor Yaede and other Hamilton officials. (l to r) Hamilton Economic Development Director Marty Flynn, Hamilton Superintendent of Schools Dr. Scott Rocco, Hamilton Mayor Kelly A. Yaede with Bill Wolfe and Janet Haag.



Right: Long-time volunteer Bill Wolfe makes a personal statement following the rededication of the Wolfe Family Education Room at NAMI Mercer's new home in Hamilton. Eleven years ago, Bill and his wife Betty, along with Robert and Barbara Wolfe, endowed the large conference room at our Lawrenceville location in honor of their mother Olga. The new room also honors Bill and Betty's daughter Katherine. An architect by profession, Bill was instrumental in designing and furnishing our new offices.



Spotlight on Danita Saunders-Davis



Danita receiving her 10th anniversary gift from Janet Haag, at the Harvest of Hope in October.

by Kathi Barringer

In 2017, we celebrated ten years of dedication from a special person, our very own Danita Saunders-Davis, who joined NAMI in May, 2007. We all recognize her smiling face, but how well do we really know our accomplished director of Operations? To learn more, I recently asked her a few questions.

Originally from Hightstown, NJ, Danita was born in Princeton Hospital in October, making her a Libra, the sign of justice, balance and harmony. Libras are also said to be natural peacekeepers, imagine that! Her family moved to Trenton when she was a child, and they lived there for most of her youth, until ending up in Willingboro, NJ, where she completed her final years of high school.

After high school, Danita went to The College of New Jersey and studied sociology. After completing her junior year, she decided to enlist in the Army. Most of her time was spent in Texas, but she also lived in Teague, South Korea, for two years.

Danita enjoyed her eight years in the military, achieving the rank of Sergeant E-5. Nevertheless, Danita missed her family, and so, in 2005, she moved back to NJ where she found a job working for the Division of Child Behavioral Health. There she discovered that she wasn't busy enough, so one day while looking through the classifieds, she found an ad for an opportunity at NAMI Mercer. The rest is kismet! She credits her response to the following interview question for getting the job.

INTERVIEWER: "How do you handle stress?"

DANITA: "I'm going to tell you the truth, but I hope it

doesn't hinder me from getting the job. I pray!"

Faith has always been a very important part of Danita's life. Her favorite quote comes from Proverbs 3:5-6 of the King James Bible: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

As director of Operations at NAMI Mercer, Danita oversees the administrative infrastructure and processes of the organization, including work flow, office technology and resources, and the training and supervision of volunteers. She also manages the finances—both accounts receivable and payable and creates reports. Helping to coordinate meetings, fundraisers, and trainings are also part of Danita's responsibilities.

"Danita is one of the most compassionate, meticulous, multi, multi, multi taskers that I have ever worked with," commented Jerome Kidd, a dedicated volunteer who works many hours in the NAMI office.

Since joining NAMI and becoming an indispensable part of the staff, Danita completed her B.S.B.A. degree in Organizational Management at Thomas Edison State College. She was also diagnosed with breast cancer in 2011, but she didn't let that keep her down. She worked through two surgeries and numerous radiation treatments and is now a proud cancer survivor!

In addition to serving in the Army, Danita held a number of positions prior to coming to NAMI. The common denominator for all was service. She was the manager of Service Excellence at a customer service call center and an

executive assistant at Providence Health Plans. Her job at Providence Health led to volunteer work at the Portland Rescue Mission, and ultimately, a position at Shepherd's Door, a residence for at-risk families in the Portland, Oregon area.

Danita is married to her high-school sweetheart, Leon Davis. She has two children, daughter Talaya and son Michael. When I asked where her dream vacation would be, her

response was immediate, "Texas, so I can be with my granddaughter!" Baylee is one-year old, and there are two more granddaughters on the way; both due this winter. Stay tuned for some proud grandmother conversations come February/March of 2018.

Danita's favorite part of her job is watching volunteers grow and being part of that development. She sees firsthand that volunteering often helps move one away from despair and toward recovery.

"Danita is at her finest when interacting with volunteers, many of whom are in recovery," commented Madeline Monheit, long-time member of the Board.

"She welcomes everyone with an abundance of warmth and nurtures those who need her attention, helping them to be productive and build self-confidence."



National Alliance on Mental Illness

nami

Mercer

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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home@namimercer.org
namimercer.org

NAMI MERCER PROGRAMS

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Family-to-Family

12-session program for family members of adults living with mental illness. Feb. 15–May 10, 6:30–9 pm (no class March 29)
NAMI Mercer Center.

In Our Own Voice and Ending the Silence

Presentations to promote awareness and instill a message of hope through personal stories of recovery. Call to book a presentation.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Feb. 27, 7:40 pm
Medicaid, SSI and Other Important Entitlements
NAMI Mercer Center.

March 8, Noon–1:00 pm
Brown Bag Luncheon on **Self-Care for Parents**, NAMI Mercer Center.

April 12, 7:30 pm
Film Screening: “Ripple: The Suicide Effect” AMC Hamilton
24. Tickets required

June 14, 6:30–8 pm
This Is Your Body on Stress, RWJ Fitness and Wellness Center, Hamilton.

SUPPORT GROUPS

NAMI Connection

Recovery support group for adults living with mental illness. Second and fourth Thursdays, 7–8:30 pm. First and third Wednesdays, 2–3:30 pm.
NAMI Mercer Center.
Walk-ins welcome.

IFSS/NAMI Support Groups

For families of adults living with mental illness. First and third Mondays, 5:15–6:45 pm at Lawrence Road Presbyterian Church. Tuesdays, 5:15–6:45 pm at the NAMI Mercer Center.

Parent Support Network

For parents/caregivers of children and adolescents, TBD.

Hearing Voices Support Group

For adults who hear voices or have other unusual sensory experiences. Mondays, 2–3 pm
NAMI Mercer Center.

Wellness and Recovery Action Plan (WRAP®) Workshops

8-session program for individuals living with mental illness. Wednesdays, Feb. 28–Apr. 18, 6–8:30 pm
NAMI Mercer Center.

WRAP®Online Support

Thursdays, 7–8 pm.
Call 605.562.3185. Enter the meeting ID 149 245 4791 when prompted or access a video conference at <https://meetings.ringcentral.com/j/1492454791>.

Just Friends Social Support Group

Peer-led group that meets regularly for fun activities and good times. Meet & Greet (required for first-time attendees). First Wednesdays, 3–4 pm
NAMI Mercer Center.
Call in advance to attend.

Overcoming Social Anxiety Workshop

For adults who experience fear of interacting with others in social situations. Wednesdays, Apr. 25–Jul. 18, 7–9 pm. NAMI Mercer Center. Offered in partnership with Find Your Voice.

ASK THE SOCIAL WORKER TELECONFERENCE

First Mondays, 7–8:30 pm
Phone: 773.231.9226
Call ID: 149 914 8712 when prompted.

VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

First Wednesdays, 5–6 pm
NAMI Mercer Center.
Call in advance to attend.

All NAMI Mercer support groups, workshops, and classes are provided at no cost to participants. Registration is required for Family-to-Family classes, WRAP, and the Overcoming Social Anxiety Workshop.

SUICIDE

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Save the Date: Film Screening

Thursday, April 12th, 7:30 pm

AMC Hamilton 24

Sponsored by NAMI Mercer and A.I.R.

*For more information and to reserve tickets,
contact home@namimercer.org.*

“Suicide: The Ripple Effect” is a feature-length documentary film highlighting the journey of Kevin Hines, who at age 19, attempted to take his life by jumping from the Golden Gate Bridge. This film focuses on the devastating effects of suicide and the tremendous positive ripple effects of advocacy, inspiration, and hope that are helping millions heal and stay alive.

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