

nAMI Mercer

Families Meeting the Challenge of Mental Illness

December 2009

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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. 12 (Tuesday), 7:30 to 9 p.m.

Hearing Distressing Voices: A Workshop for Family Members

Emma Shelby

Community Educator, MHANJ

Experience a simulation of hearing voices that will enhance your empathy and understanding of the challenges that face people with psychiatric disabilities. The goal is to better address the needs of people who hear voices. This workshop is not appropriate for anyone who experiences voices.

Feb. 16 (Tuesday), 7:30 to 9 p.m.

Advocating the Best Health Care for Your Special Kid

Lauren Agoratus

Family Voices NJ, Statewide Parents' Advocacy Network of NJ, NAMI Mercer Board and parent of Stephanie

Mar. 16 (Tuesday), 7:30 to 9 p.m.

Panel Discussion: Spirituality and Mental Health

A panel of clergy and NAMI members of different faiths will wrestle with questions of how spirituality, mental health, and mental illness are connected.

Night Out With Frédéric Chopin

NAMI Mercer is pleased to announce that Sen. Richard J. Codey and Mrs. Mary Jo Codey will serve as the honorary chairpersons of our eighth annual Night Out with NAMI concert and dinner on January 10, 2010. This event is our organization's major fundraiser, generating resources to sustain NAMI Mercer's free education and support programs.

Over the years, the Codeys have shown great commitment to improving the lives of people affected by mental illness. Most recently, the senator sponsored legislation that will bring much-needed outpatient mental health assistance to those who present a danger to themselves or others by refusing treatment.

We also appreciate and respect Mrs. Codey for her candid discussion about her past struggles with depression. Her willingness to speak publicly contributes enormously to erasing the social stigma associated with mental illness.

At this year's concert, Dr. Richard Kogan will commemorate the 200th



Mary Jo Codey and Senator Richard Codey, honorary chairs of Night Out with NAMI this January.

anniversary of the birth of composer Frédéric Chopin by playing selections of his work and discussing the healing power of music in the composer's life. A renowned concert pianist and psychiatrist, Dr. Kogan will be making his eighth appearance at our annual fundraiser.

Night Out, which begins at 3:00 p.m.,

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PURCHASE TICKETS NOW

8th Annual NIGHT OUT WITH NAMI, JAN. 10, 2010

Dr. Richard Kogan, psychiatrist and concert pianist, will perform the works of Frédéric Chopin and discuss the healing power of music in the composer's life. Concert at 3:00 p.m. in the Music Building, The College of New Jersey, Ewing.

Silent auction and gala reception at 5:30 p.m. at Eickhoff Hall. Proceeds will benefit NAMI Mercer's free education and support programs. Details are on Page 2.

Executive Director's Message

Have You Renewed Your Membership This Year?

I first heard about NAMI after a two-year odyssey with psychiatrists, therapists and hospitals led to a clear diagnosis of mental illness for our loved one. "What would you do if this were your family?" we asked the doctor. Without a blink of the eye, he said, "I'd call NAMI."

We didn't know anything about NAMI, but we found our local affiliate and joined. Within a few weeks, we enrolled in Family to Family where we met 18 other family members who deeply understood the journey we faced. We belonged together, and we felt relieved of the loneliness that mental illness brings to families. Being part of a group that understood our experience empowered us to cope with our challenges.

That was more than 12 years ago. In 2007, I became the executive director of NAMI Mercer. Imagine my embarrassment when, reviewing our membership files, I discovered that I no longer was a current member!

I had not paid my \$38 annual membership dues, even though I remained

as committed as ever to the NAMI mission. I had continued to use Helpline services and to attend NAMI Mercer educational events.

NAMI memberships are annual and need to be renewed every year. My guess is that many of our participants THINK they are members, but technically are not. So here's my request—please JOIN or REJOIN.

Why join?

- Because we need the human resources to realize our goal of improving the lives of individuals and families affected by mental illness.
- Because we are more likely to receive funding if our membership rolls remain high.
- Because we need your voice as we advocate to legislators. Our message is more powerful with more people.

Important advocacy issues for 2010

- We need to ensure that mental health issues are addressed by National Health Care Reform.
- We need to protect funding for

mental health as state legislators and the governor work to balance the state budget.

- We need to be vigilant and speak out during the development of regulations to enforce the new NJ

Involuntary Outpatient Commitment Law.

As a participant in our programs and a supporter of our mission, please JOIN or REJOIN when you receive your personal invitation in the mail next month. Or join right now at www.namimercer.org.

Thank you for supporting NAMI Mercer through your membership.

Sincerely,

Sally Osmer
Executive Director



NAMI Mercer Book Club:

"What is the What"

The NAMI Mercer Book Club welcomes all NAMI members to its meetings on the third Thursday of each month at 11:30 a.m. Bring your own lunch and participate in stimulating discussions about relevant literature and works of non-fiction.

The club generally meets in the NAMI Mercer education room. Call the office at (609) 799-8994 for the specific location of the upcoming meeting.

We will meet next on Dec. 17 at 11:30 a.m. to talk about Dave Eggers's novel "What is the What," based on the story of Valentino Achak Deng, one of "the lost boys of the Sudan" who fled from his village in the southern Sudan to temporary shelter in Ethiopia, a refugee camp in Kenya, and finally to Atlanta.

Become a StigmaBuster!

NAMI StigmaBusters is a network of dedicated advocates across the country and around the world who seek to fight inaccurate and hurtful representations of mental illness.

Whether these images are found in TV, film, print, or other media, StigmaBusters speak out and challenge stereotypes. Their goal is to break down the barriers of ignorance, prejudice, or unfair discrimination by promoting education, understanding, and respect.

Join the 20,000 NAMI StigmaBusters by signing up to receive alerts. To learn more and to enroll, select "Fight Stigma" from the left-hand menu at www.nami.org.

Night Out

continued from Page 1

will be held in the Music Building of The College of New Jersey in Ewing. A gala dinner and reception at Eickhoff Hall will follow.

During the reception, there will be music by "Thursday Night Jazz," a trio of young musicians who perform a mix of fusion, funk, blues, pop, and smooth jazz from contemporary and traditional artists such as Duke Ellington and George Gershwin.

The ticket price for the concert is \$70 for adults and \$40 for youths ages 11-18. The price for both concert and dinner is \$185 for adults and \$155 for youths. If you cannot attend, please consider making a donation, sponsoring the event, or advertising in our event program.

For more information or to purchase tickets, go to www.namimercer.org or call 609-799-8994.

Exciting Time in Psychiatry and Medicine

By Bill Hayes

In my last column, I focused on the importance of stress management, diet, and exercise as part of a wellness program to optimize health and recovery. I'd like to use this column to describe two areas of research that, in the next 25 years, hold great promise for individuals who are affected by brain-based biological illnesses.

Pharmacogenomics

Pharmacogenomics is the science of how individuals react to medications. It offers the potential to develop customized drug treatments based on an individual's genetic background. In the next decade, ongoing research in genetic testing should improve both the diagnosis of psychiatric illnesses as well as the identification of effective treatments. Currently many patients endure multiple drug trials until they find an effective and well-tolerated medication. Unfortunately, some patients experience significant side effects that delay their recovery. One major reason is that even slight genetic variations affect how the body responds to medication.

Roche has developed the Amplichip, the first FDA-approved genetic test to analyze a patient's cytochrome P450 (abbreviated CYP) system of enzymes in the liver. These enzymes are responsible for metabolizing (breaking down) more than 30 types of medications, thus determining how quickly and effectively these medications are

eliminated from the body. Ten percent of individuals have genes that break down medications slowly, causing higher drug levels in the blood and greater likelihood of side effects. Another ten percent of individuals metabolize medication very rapidly, placing them at risk of not achieving therapeutic blood levels with routine doses.

The Amplichip can now test for CYP 450 2D6 and 2C19 genotypes from a blood sample to determine appropriate dosing of certain antidepressants, anticoagulants, proton-pump inhibitors, and a number of other medications.

Obtaining genetic assays prior to treatment would allow physicians to more finely tune a patient's medications. While CYP testing is currently available, this technology will offer even more exciting possibilities for the future. Many insurers, however, consider CYP experimental and do not cover genetic testing.

Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)

Another exciting area of research is fMRI, a type of specialized MRI scan that measures the hemodynamic response (change in blood flow) related to neural activity in the brain. This technology is bringing us new knowledge of human brain functions, better understanding of brain disorders, and improvement in medical practices. Since most fMRI techniques are noninvasive and do not involve the injection

of radioactive materials, they can be used repeatedly.

In the future, fMRIs hold great promise as diagnostic and treatment aids; however, at present, neither the American Psychiatric Association nor the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry has endorsed their current use as they remain experimental and are not currently a diagnostic tool even though they are advertised as such by some physicians.

This is an exciting time in psychiatry and medicine. In the next quarter century, NAMI Mercer will continue its mission of ensuring that persons affected by mental illness have access to newly emerging technologies and effective, evidence-based, affordable services that improve their quality of life and promote real recovery.

We will continue to fight stigma and to educate the public about the needs of these persons and their families.



Bill Hayes

William P. Hayes

M.D., F.A.A.C.A.P.

President

Volunteers needed for NOWN

I hope you have received your invitation to Night Out with NAMI on January 10, 2010 at The College of New Jersey and are planning to attend.

You can enjoy the concert free of charge by volunteering to help during the event. We still have positions open, but they are filling up quickly. If you are available, please e-mail me as soon as possible at ttompkins@namimercer.org.

As we near the end of 2009, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all the wonderful volunteers who contributed their time and energy to all our various programs, events and office activities.

My best wishes for a healthy and happy holiday season.

Tom Tompkins, Volunteer Coordinator

NAMI Mercer statistics through October

Total number of people involved in NAMI's work	3,000
Increase over 2008	25%
People attending Soloist & Harvest of Hope events	450
Total volunteer hours worked	5,051
Total number of IOOV presentations	47
IOOV presentations in Trenton	18
People who attended IOOV presentations	962
People who reported a reduction in stigma in themselves or others	67%
Number of Just Friends activities	76

Harvest of Hope Conference, October 10

More than 120 NAMI Mercer family members and friends gathered to learn about recovery at our first annual Harvest of Hope Conference on Oct. 10 at the Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville. Keynote speaker Dr. Sharon O'Brien, author of "The Family Silver: A Memoir of Depression and Inheritance," gave a moving and enlightening lecture on her personal struggles with depression and stigma in American culture.

Later, guests participated in small-group workshops to learn ways to promote wellness and recovery.

Overall, participants rated the conference an average of 4.73 out of 5.0. When asked the most important concept

they learned, here is what attendees responded:

"Anyone can recover from mental illness."

"I'm not the only one and shouldn't be embarrassed."

"There is great support all around for people living with mental illness and great hope for living fulfilling lives."

"There is power in sharing your story."

"With silence comes stigma and shame carried on the inside."

"There is hope for maintaining my mental health if I have a structured plan."

"Self-direction and empowerment are very important in recovery."



Top, from left: Michelle Berenwick and Ann Basile.

Top right: Joanna Harrison-Smith and Thomas Klem.

Above: Delores Williams and Nora Kales.

Right: Heart to Hearts VP Sue Methot and Libby Bartholomew.



Left, from left: NAMI Mercer President Bill Hayes, keynote speaker Sharon O'Brien and NAMI Mercer Executive Director Sally Osmer.

Below left: Volunteer Coordinator Tom and former board member Caroline Tompkins

Below right: Amandalynn Salzman of IFSS and Jen Selmon, an intern from Rider University.



My Daughter, Hannah Behrendt

By Nancy Behrendt

As soon as Hannah could hold a pencil, she began drawing. She was a quiet child who enjoyed playing alone, writing, and sketching. Once she had her own computer, she learned to draw using a mouse and later, a computerized pen and tablet.

Since her early teens, Hannah has been creating fan art for commissions through the Internet. She has received honors for her artwork and has a piece on display at the M.I.N.D. Institute at the University of California at Davis.

Hannah's artwork is extraordinary because, in spite of her diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome (an autism spectrum disorder), she captures facial expressions with life-like realism.

When she sees a face, especially the eyes, she sees many feelings, moods and thoughts, and it is difficult for her to discern what is being communicated



nonverbally. This may account for why many persons with autism look away or appear unresponsive when communicating face-to-face.

Hannah has taken the study of the face and applied it to her artwork.

The subject of most of Hannah's art

is horror, which may reflect her frequent battles with terrifying hallucinations. She draws pictures of dead, dying and mutilated beings with meticulous detail. Hannah's hallucinations are even more frightening than her drawings.

Medication has been somewhat helpful, but side-effects often lead to Hannah's taking "medication vacations." She is going to try the newer monthly injections with hope that the visions will cease.

Hannah doesn't know what her career will be, but she always will be an artist. She is taking online classes towards a degree in game art design and dabbles in animated art and watercolor painting.

Hannah looks forward to exhibiting her art and thanks NAMI Mercer for providing this opportunity.

Coping with Stress during the Holidays

By Amy Layng, Amandalynn Salzman,
and Shoshanna Price

Most of us work very hard. During holiday season, stress, fatigue, unreasonable expectations, and tough economic times may lead to “the blues.” The pressures of holiday shopping, parties, and house guests can also make this time of year particularly difficult. For people without friends or family, the holidays intensify feelings of loneliness.

Dealing with Holiday Stressors

Keep your expectations for the holiday season manageable by setting realistic goals. Pace yourself. Organize your time. Make lists and prioritize your activities.

Remember that during the holidays, people may feel sad or lonely. It is appropriate to acknowledge these feelings even if you choose not to express them to others.

Leave the past in the past and look toward the future. Search for the good in all life changes.

Volunteer your time to help others. Do something in the community that makes a small difference. It feels good.

Having fun does not necessarily mean spending money. Take a drive to see the holiday lights at night. Make angels in the snow. Take out holiday movies from the local library.

Be aware that excessive drinking will only increase your feelings of depression.

Celebrate the holidays in a different way. Try new experiences.

Spend time with loving and supportive people. Make new friends. Contact someone you haven't heard from in a while.

Delegate tasks to others. Take some time to indulge yourself.

If you or someone you know suffers from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), bundle up and go outdoors. SAD studies show that early morning sunlight helps to relieve this type of depression.

During the holiday season, if you or someone you love is suffering with a mental illness, contact:

NAMI Mercer at 609-799-8994 or
Intensive Family Support Services
at 609-396-6788 Ext 236.

Farewell to Amy Layng

By Madeline Monheit

NAMI Mercer bids a fond farewell to Amy Layng, who left her position as Program Coordinator of Intensive Family Support Services (IFFS) on Dec. 8 to assume a new position with Greater Trenton Behavioral Healthcare as a school-based therapist.

For more than six years, Amy has worked collaboratively with NAMI Mercer families affected by mental illness to provide them with the knowledge, skills and supports to improve the family's overall functioning and sense of control. Funded by the State of New Jersey, IFFS offers family services free of charge, regardless of whether the ill family member is receiving mental health services.

Amy and her IFSS staff have been leading NAMI Mercer family support groups on Mondays from 5:30-7:00 p.m. at the Lawrence Road Presbyterian Church and on a biweekly basis on Tuesdays from 5:30 to 7:00 p.m. at the NAMI Center of Mercer County.

IFSS also provides consultation and counseling to families in their homes or other comfortable settings. Some meetings take place at the NAMI Mercer Center.



Amy Layng

In her good-bye letter to NAMI Mercer families, Amy wrote: “I’ve had the privilege of learning so much from all of you. I’ve learned what it means to have strength and have seen true

resiliency within families during hard times. I feel blessed to have worked intimately with truly extraordinary people.”

Amy and NAMI Mercer staff and volunteers also have enjoyed a wonderful collaborative relationship.

“I will remain a card-carrying member of the NAMI admiration society,” said Amy.

“I respect the past pioneers and present staff and volunteers that give so much of themselves. Sally and Danita have created an atmosphere of comfort that welcomes everyone and makes them feel a part of something very special.”

In addition to her new career providing therapy to youngsters and families in two Trenton elementary schools, Amy plans to continue pursuing her creative endeavors. She enjoys macrobiotic and vegetarian cooking and running, winning a medal at age 53 in her first 5K race. She is now enrolled in a documentary film-making class with hopes of someday assisting her son in his goal to become the next Scorsese, Kubrick, or Fellini.

Amy urges her NAMI Mercer friends to keep in touch with her at work at (609) 396-6788 or alayng@gtbhc.org or at home at amyslayng@comcast.net.

NAMI Mercer

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What's Been on YOUR Mind Lately?

NAMI Mercer is forming a group where participants will explore and communicate their personal experiences, opinions and responses to life through the written word. We will write about and share our perspective and feeling about major events as well as everyday experiences, but most importantly, you'll determine what is meaningful to you.

The goal of our writers' group is simply to express, reveal and release our thoughts and feelings. The idea, inspired by Dr. Sharon O'Brien, who led the memoir-writing workshop at our Harvest of Hope Conference on Oct. 10, is that writing is an effective self-help tool for stress management, personal understanding, and fulfillment.

We plan to meet one weekday evening per month. If you are interested in joining, please contact our office at 609-799-8994 and let us know your availability.

Elise Wilmot gets Alan Lunt Award

At its annual conference on Nov. 12, the New Jersey Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association presented its prestigious Alan Lunt Memorial Award for Consumer Advocacy to Elise Wilmot. Given annually, the award recognizes an outstanding mental health peer provider in the state.

Elise is employed by Greater Trenton Behavioral Healthcare (GTBH) on its Residential Intensive Support Team (RIST). RIST is a state-funded program that works to reintegrate former long-term residents of state psychiatric hospitals back into the community. Peer providers relate effectively to these people because of empathy based on common experience.

In addition to her work with GTBH, Elise is a very active NAMI Mercer volunteer. She is an In Our Own Voice speaker, bringing her personal story of recovery to a wide range of audiences. She co-facilitates our NAMI Connection peer support group and is also a member/volunteer in NAMI Mercer's Just Friends social program.

The Alan Lunt Award is named for Alan Lunt, who was a former peer



Elise Wilmot received the Alan Lunt Consumer Advocate Award on November 12, in Woodbridge. Pictured with her are Ni Gao and Bill Waynor of the Integrated Employment Institute of UMDNJ. The NJ Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association presents the award annually.

advocate for the Mental Health Association of Morristown NJ. The award is given to a consumer for:

- Promoting empowerment among consumers
- Providing advocacy on a variety of levels
- Demonstrating recovery through psychiatric rehabilitation principles
- Making a significant contribution in the lives of other consumers of mental health services.

Lauren and Stephanie Agoratus honored

NAMI Mercer Board member Lauren Agoratus was honored as "Humanitarian of the Year" at the ASAH annual conference in November. ASAH is a not-for-profit organization of private schools and agencies in New Jersey that provide highly specialized services to more than 11,000 infants, children and young adults with disabilities.

The ASAH award recognizes advocacy and leadership on behalf of New Jersey citizens with special needs and their families.

Lauren, whose daughter Stephanie

has significant disabilities and special health care needs, is New Jersey's Family Voices Coordinator and also works on the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) Family to Family Health Information Center.

In spite of her disabilities, Stephanie also has received many awards in honor of her volunteer work. She was recently featured in the Fall/Winter edition of the New Road School's "Traveler" newsletter. You can read about Stephanie at www.spannj.org/-Stephanie.pdf.

A man falls into a hole so deep he can't get out. A doctor lowers a prescription into the hole. A clergyman tosses in a prayer.

Finally, a stranger walks by and jumps into the hole.

"Why did you do that?" the man asks. "Now we're both in the hole."

"Yes," the stranger responds. "But I've been in this hole before, and I know the way out."

HOW TO REACH US

THE NAMI CENTER *of Mercer County*

Lawrence Commons
3371 Brunswick Pike
Suite 124
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648

(609) 799-8994
fax (609) 799-8996
home@namimercer.org
www.namimercer.org

Directions: From southbound Rte. 1,
pass Province Line Road and make a
right at the Office Depot sign. Lawrence
Commons is a white building, second on
your left. Drive to the rear of the building.
The NAMI Center is in Suite 124 on the
ground floor.

NAMI Mercer Support Groups

NAMI Connection

For adult consumers, run by consumers
1st through 4th Mondays, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.
Registration required.
NAMI Center of Mercer County.

WRAP

A wellness/recovery action program for consumers
This program will restart in January.
Registration required.
NAMI Center.

Weight Management

For adult consumers and families
4th Wednesdays, 6:00 p.m.
For December, the 3rd Wednesday
Visitors welcome.
NAMI Center.

IFSS/NAMI

For families of adults with mental illness
Mondays, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
Lawrence Road Presbyterian Church *and*
Biweekly Tuesdays, 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
NAMI Center
(Contact NAMI at 609-799-8994 for Tuesday dates.)

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