



NAMI
National Alliance on Mental Illness

Mercer *Messenger*

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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.

Calling All NAMI Mercer Members!

NAMI Mercer's upcoming Annual Meeting on June 26 will be critically important. Your attendance is urgently requested. Why? Many of you attended a membership meeting on April 3 and heard from a small group of members who strongly criticized our organization's leadership and financial management and expressed a different vision for NAMI Mercer than the one that has served us for the past 25 years. In addition, the Board received a petition with five signatures requesting dramatic revisions to our by-laws. These issues and proposed changes to our governance will be discussed at the Annual Meeting.

Although we have nearly 350 member households, historically, less than a third of our members attend the Annual Meeting. If you are a long-standing member, perhaps you think that it's not important for you to be there every June. If you are new to the organization, you may not understand why your presence is so crucial. This meeting is different. We strongly urge all members to attend.

On June 26, the Board will present our 2016 Annual Report, which includes our Financial and Program

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"Passage To Hope" Wins Best Documentary Award at Nassau Film Festival in Princeton

NAMI Mercer's newly released "Passage to Hope" won top honors as Best Documentary at the Nassau Film Festival on Saturday, May 20, in Princeton.

The 11-minute film features seven NAMI Mercer members and loved ones discussing the effects of mental illness on their family lives. Appearing in the film are Pat Demers (former Board president), Kimme Carlos (former Board member), Tom Pyle (Board member), and volunteers Barb Cavagnaro, Turba Contento, Tara Hughes, Will Leavey, and Julie Maddocks. The film frames their odysseys through the challenging stages of the family experience, from crisis and despair to accommodation and hope.

Members of the video's production team who attended the film festival were NAMI Mercer Board members Robert T. Hedden and Tom Pyle and volunteers Will Leavey, Julie Maddocks, and Jeff Schotland. Unable to attend were Brian Boni and Chris Nesi. Chris, in particular, was publicly acknowledged by all as a gifted creative force for the film.

One of 40 films selected by the Nassau Film Festival from 350 applicants, Passage opens with a dramatic tunnel scene accompanied by haunting cello



From left: film project contributors Robert T. Hedden, Janet Haag, Tom Pyle, Pat Demers, Julie Maddocks, Maddy Monheit and Jeff Schotland.

notes and the stressful sounds and sight of an ambulance headed late at night to a hospital emergency room. Early scenes then depict family members' anxieties, doubts, fears, and frustrations.

"It's very complex," Julie relates in the film. "It affects the family in many ways. You're always on edge . . ." The experience shook Tom's personal faith to the core. "Many times I have asked my God, what is your purpose that I do not understand, that you have put this heavy burden on my son?" Doleful confessions about the effects of stigma are also offered. Tara laments: "You sometimes feel like you don't fit in, that people look at us like we're different."

Mirroring the family experience of many, the film progresses to more settled moods of resignation, accommodation, and acceptance, as well as heartfelt acknowledgements of NAMI's help along the way. As Pat emphasizes, NAMI

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YOUR VOTES WILL DETERMINE NAMI MERCER'S FUTURE!

**NAMI Mercer Annual Meeting, Monday, June 26, 2017
6:00 to 8:00 p.m., Conant Hall, Educational Testing Service (ETS)
660 Rosedale Rd., Princeton, NJ**

Executive Director's Message

A Seafarer's Wisdom

Some years ago, during summer vacation, a dear friend's brother offered to take a few of us out on a small sailboat. Steve was a good sailor, but the rest of us had never been sailing before. We all boarded the boat, and Steve set about hoisting the sail and doing whatever else needed to be done. The three of us seated ourselves on the back of the boat, laughing and talking, dangling our legs in the water.



Janet Haag

Several times, Steve tried unsuccessfully to turn the boat, catch the wind, and head out on to the lake. Puzzled by the difficulty he was having setting sail, Steve left his post to talk to us. It was then he noticed what was holding us back. Being a man of great good humor, he laughed, pointed toward our feet pushing the water around, and noted, "we aren't going anywhere with that

going on." The seafarer's wisdom here? We won't get where we want to go if we are creating resistance by working against each other.

Like unexpected weather conditions that kick up over the water, the environment in which we are operating has changed dramatically in recent years and is still in flux. Technology increases accessibility to information and shifts the way we learn; there are many more nonprofits competing for attention and support; funding from corporations and foundations has slowed down; there is a much greater emphasis on outcome measures and "return on investment" statistics; and strategic partnerships are key.

To go back to our sailing analogy—we have to be willing to "catch the winds" of change if we are to be a vibrant, effective organization. We have to chart our course by identifying the opportunities in front of us that will best meet the needs of people today. NAMI Mercer has exciting possibilities on the horizon. We are trying new programs and new models for delivery. We are forging new partnerships with organizations who match our

mission. This is not to say we are being foolhardy. Rather, we are reading conditions and adapting accordingly. We can hang around the dock and keep doing things the way we've always done them or we can pull our feet up into the boat and head out to the open sea. There is no adventure in going round and round in the harbor.

Our ultimate success will depend on great leadership and great teamwork, as well as strategic decision-making. To get there, we need to steer away from reactionary thinking and negativity that cause fatigue and frustration, creating a drag on forward momentum. We need to pull our energies into common effort, get behind our shared vision of building better lives for individuals and families affected by mental illness, and commit ourselves to making sure all of us can enjoy the journey. **WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER**—and if we're not — we need to be — or we aren't going anywhere.

Janet Haag
Executive Director

All Members!

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Reports for the year. It is also Election Day for NAMI Mercer's leadership, and we have wonderful veteran Board members standing for re-election and brand new candidates who, we believe, will help NAMI Mercer to expand its influence, support services and education programs, bringing fresh ideas and new members/donors to the table.

This Annual Meeting is your opportunity to discuss and vote on the kind of organization you want NAMI Mercer to be. Take this election to heart and remember that those we elect will be setting the strategic direction for our organization and determining whether we will have the talent and skills to grow and increase our impact at all levels.

Get Ready to Rock on November 4

The Night Out with NAMI (NOWN) Committee, under the leadership of Coleen Burrus and Dave Skrodski, has made substantial progress in planning for the 2017 event. Please mark your calendars for Saturday night, November 4, 2017, and spread the word to your friends and family.

Night Out will have a new format, a new theme, and a new location – The Windsor Athletic Club on Clarksville Road in Princeton. Join us for a trip down memory lane to an old-fashioned dinner/dance in your high school gym.

The theme will be Rock & Roll, and we are encouraging guests to dress in attire from the 50s and 60s. Poodle skirts, leather jackets, bell bottoms and tie-dyed clothing are all fitting for



Who are these guys and what dance are they doing?

the occasion. There will be music, dancing and games from the era.

We are looking for volunteers to serve on the NOWN Committee. Please contact Christine Bakter (cbakter@namimercer.org) if you would like to be involved. More details to follow over the summer.

Reflections on Our Past, Present and Future by Former NAMI Mercer Board Presidents

CHOMY GARCES (1992-1994)

I began with NAMI Mercer in 1977 with a few families needing mutual support as we moved through a difficult system with our children with mental illness.

NAMI Mercer became my hope and my salvation. Families are very important at that most difficult time.

We learned so much from each other. I remember feeling that our family group was really our family, and I know that without the help and support that I received, I would have never had made it. With time, we learned how to help others, and it was so gratifying for Tom and me. Helping families remains at the heart of NAMI Mercer's mission today.

BILL WILMOT (1998-2002)

NAMI Mercer has been a godsend to the Wilmots. In 1995, when we joined, it was a rapidly growing, ably led, all-volunteer organization. Successes were possible only with the full-time efforts of Tom and Chomy Garces. Headless organizations fail. Finding dedicated volunteer replacements to maintain momentum was virtually impossible. Paid staff was essential.

Though NAMI Mercer remains NJ's largest affiliate, challenges abound. It must and does change by dropping, altering, and adding services and finding new funds and volunteers. Any assessment of merit that ignores the huge contribution of volunteers is flawed and unfair. We think the Board, staff, and volunteers continue to do an excellent job under unnecessarily difficult circumstances.

ELLEN HEATH (2002-2005)

It was a pleasure to be present at a recent NAMI Mercer Board meeting and be witness to the vitality of the organization under the direction of the current Board and executed by Janet Haag, Danita Saunders-Davis, and Christine Bakter. It was good to know that the organization has moved proactively with the times, finding new ways to be visible and relevant. I feel confident that NAMI



L to r: Bill Wilmot, Chomy Garces, Karen Marquis, Bill Hayes. Seated l to r: Ellen Heath and Pat Demers.

Mercer will be serving people with mental illness and their families well from here forward.

PAT DEMERS (2005-2008)

The current NAMI Mercer Board is composed of exemplary professionals in a variety of industries. They bring a wealth of skills from communications, legal, fundraising, and

marketing, as well as a strong understanding of what it means for a family to live with mental illness and a deep compassion for helping those in need.

The organization has always been proud of the dedicated volunteers who are integral to the HelpLine, administrative support, programs and projects. The kindness and generosity of both the staff and volunteers are unfailing. Through good fiscal management, NAMI Mercer has steadily built a strong, viable, and stable organization over the last fifteen years. When I was president, we struggled to build an organization with professional management and officers. Today, the budget is strong, with reserves and endowment funding.

WILLIAM HAYES (2008-2012)

I want to thank Karen Marquis for the excellent job she and the NAMI Board have done under her leadership. Since I completed my term as Board President, NAMI Mercer and its volunteers have continued to provide education, advocacy, and support to individuals and families affected by mental disorders despite the national decrease in funding to non-profits from corporate sources. Following Sally Osmer's retirement, Karen and the Board conducted the search that led to the hiring of our new Executive Director Janet Haag. Under Karen's leadership, NAMI built on the work of our founders and past Boards to ensure the financial survival and future growth of NAMI Mercer by instituting the NAMI Mercer "Fund for the Future" with the Princeton Area Community Foundation. I am proud of the work of Janet Haag, Karen Marquis and the NAMI Board.

How I Feel About

■ ■ ■



By Ayesha Karim

I love myself and nobody can ever take that away from me.

Sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me.

I am very sensitive, and though I'd love to say nothing bothers me, that is not true.

I dealt with harsh criticism since my childhood and so when people criticize me today as a 35-year-old woman, it's nothing new to me.

What is new though is this self-assured, confident, self-loving 35-year-old woman (person) I have become.

That self-acceptance alone draws others to me that I have little in common with other than the fact that we are all mentally ill, suffering from a mental illness or are all females (women).

KAREN MARQUIS (2012-present)

NAMI Mercer has enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most vibrant and effective local affiliates in New Jersey—and this was no accident.

At a meeting of NAMI affiliate leadership for New Jersey in 2015, I was asked how we did it. "The answer," I replied, "lies in the vision and diligence of our early founders, the members who've worked alongside us over the years, and the generosity of our donors and volunteers."

I've been fortunate to lead a dedicated Board of Directors who are committed to NAMI Mercer's mission and insuring our sustainability." In short, I said "They built the vehicle, and we're working hard to keep our foot on the accelerator!" My years on the Board have taught me that every Board member brings something different to the table; however, it is our ability to work as a team for the good of the community that defines our success.

Kudos to Our Board Members in the News!

COLEEN BURRUS (at right), director of Corporate Engagement and Foundation Relations at Princeton University, was featured in “Promoting Princeton: University making concerted push to engage businesses in effort to spur more partnerships and collaboration,” an article by Andrew Sheldon in the January 23 issue of NJBIZ. A weekly publication with a print circulation of 15,000, NJBIZ also reports business news online 24/7 at NJBIZ.com.

Although Princeton takes pride in being named the top university in *U.S. News and World Report* for the past four years, Sheldon reported that the school is also concerned about another reputation, “Being a university ‘in’ New Jersey but not ‘of’ New Jersey.”

Since joining Princeton in 2015, Coleen has been working to change this image by growing and fostering relationships with NJ businesses and colleges. “We definitely are an international university, no question,” she said. “But we are a New Jersey institution and we have connections that are strong here.”

Coleen encourages Garden State companies to support fellowships at the University and keep abreast of what’s going on in the labs, to hire interns and talk to the students. Businesses benefit by discovering the specialized talent they are seeking. For similar reasons, Coleen believes it is vital for Princeton to nurture its relationship with Rutgers and other institutions.

JASON REDD (at right) is this year’s winner of the “Community Advocacy Recipient Award,” presented by the Central Jersey Community Development Corporation (CJCDC) at its annual Corporate Recognition Breakfast on April 28. “Our honorees have done amazing work as change agents in the community,” said Carla Beverly, CJCDC executive director.

Jason, who resides in Trenton, recently left his position as an attorney with Gibbons P.C., one of the state’s most influential law firms, to become senior counsel to Senate President Steve Sweeney.

“[Jason] is a man of integrity who shares my belief in the importance of public service and the ability of government to improve the lives of others, especially the disadvantaged and those who are experiencing adversity,” commented Sweeney.

Jason holds a bachelor’s degree in public health and a master’s in planning and public policy from Rutgers and a law degree from Brigham Young University.

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Photo by Aaron Houston



DAN SCHUBERTH, with his wife Natalie at his side, was sworn in (above) as president of the Robbinsville Town Council on January 10 by Mayor Dave Fried. It was the first meeting held in Robbinsville’s new municipal building on Route 33.

Chairman of the town’s Economic Development Advisory Committee from 2012 to 2015, Dan helped create a network among Robbinsville’s small business owners and encouraged new businesses to open. He was elected to the Town Council in 2015.

Although he ran unopposed in 2015, Dan didn’t want to take the election for granted.

“I [didn’t] want to just walk into an office. I want[ed] to earn it. I want[ed] to earn people’s trust regardless . . .” Dan explained.

To do so, he knocked on more than 1,000 doors to open up a direct line of communication to the needs, concerns and issues of Robbinsville residents.

Dan’s day job is as a manager at McMaster-Carr, a Robbinsville-based industrial supply company.

"NERDS for NAMI" raise \$827 at Brandeis University

By Madeline Monheit

After the loss of his mother, Kathie Formoso, in 2015, Andrew Agress wanted to do something constructive to honor her memory. "I thought a lot about how active she was with NAMI Mercer and how much it meant to her," said Andrew. "I wanted to help a group that was close to her in a way that was special to me."

A senior at Brandeis with majors in Theater Arts and History and a minor in English, Andrew enjoys playing video games in his spare time. Since 24-hour video game marathons are nothing new in the world of fundraising, he decided to plan this type of competition to raise money for NAMI Mercer.

"I realized that my senior year suite-mates and friends would be great participants, so I mentioned the idea to them, and they all immediately loved it." Sara Kenney, Raphael Stigliano, Riely Allen, James Formigli, and Ellie McKnight joined Andrew in planning and executing the marathon. The name "NERDS for NAMI" was suggested by Sara, and the group approved.

The marathon began at 6:00 pm. on January 28, 2017 and continued through 6:00 pm. on January 29. The event was "held" on Twitch, a live-



streaming video platform that enables users to broadcast games and other events live on an online channel. Each channel has its own chat room, where viewers can interact with the hosts in real time. Agress and his friends called their chat room "Ziv," the name of their dorm and the Hebrew word for "light." Coincidentally, Frederick Ziv was an American broadcast pioneer, and Jacob Ziv, an Israeli computer scientist.

According to Andrew, viewers visited Ziv to watch and interact with the NERDS as they played video games. "We also had other, more theatrical segments such as a lip-sync battle, a LEGO®-building contest, a makeup tutorial, and a weird food-eating challenge," he explained. These challenges were introduced as incentives for donations.

The NERDS played 11 games in all, including "Rocket League,"

"Dishonored II," "Fallout," and "Until Dawn."

In planning the logistics for the marathon, the NERDS had to determine how participants would donate and how NAMI Mercer would retrieve the money. The group decided on GoFundMe, which collected the donations and kept track of how much had been raised.

"Our goal was \$500," said Andrew. "To our surprise, we ended up surpassing our goal with a final count of \$827 from 36 donors." Overall, 560 persons visited Ziv during the marathon. Andrew and his friends never anticipated that so many students would contribute to NAMI.

The NERDS plan to regroup next year for another marathon, perhaps for a different charity. Although Andrew graduated this spring, he hopes to take part in the 2018 fundraiser.



SAVE THE DATE

9th Annual Harvest of Hope
Wellness Conference
"Winning at
Wellness"

Saturday, October 7, 2017, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.
Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville
2688 Main Street, Lawrenceville.

This year's keynote speaker is Chamique Holdsclaw, former Olympic gold medalist and professional WNBA star, who will share her personal struggle with bipolar disorder.



More than 50 seniors at the Meadow Lakes Continuing Care Retirement Center in East Windsor attended a NAMI Mercer seminar, "Aging and Mental Health," on May 22. Volunteer and "In Our Own Voice" facilitator David Craig made the presentation in response to an invitation from Meadow Lakes.

Generous Grant Awarded to Support Harvest of Hope

NAMI Mercer recently received a \$4,000 grant award from the Lawrence Township Community Foundation (LTCF) to subsidize our 9th Annual Harvest of Hope Wellness Conference, on October 7, at the Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville. “This is the largest single grant we have received from LTCF in our 11-year funding history with them,” commented NAMI Mercer Director of Development Christine Bakter.

Accompanied by Board member Dan Schuberth, Christine accepted the award at a presentation ceremony held at the Lawrence Nature Center on May 11. Our affiliate is one of 12 local non-profit organizations to receive funding from the LTCF this spring.

Since forming in 2002, LTCF has distributed more than \$950 million

dollars in grants to organizations that benefit Lawrence residents of all ages. Completely run by volunteers, LTCF is supported by three major funders: Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, Educational Testing Service, and the Lawrenceville School.

The Foundation also receives personal donations from Lawrence citizens and businesses.

The other Spring 2017 LTCF grant recipients include Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Dress for Success, Greater Eldridge Park Neighborhood Association, Homefront, Interfaith



L to r: Liz Read presents the LTCF grant to Christine Bakter and Dan Schuberth.

Caregivers of Greater Mercer County, Lawrence Hamnett Soccer Association, Lawrence High School—Project Graduation, Lawrenceville Main Street, People & Stories/Gente y Cuentos, PEI Kids, and Womanspace.

“Compassion” Surrounds NAMIWalks Mercer County



Members of the “Compassion for ALL Our Neighbors” Team hold hands in prayer and united purpose at the 10th annual NAMIWalks Mercer County on May 6 at ETS. Two congregations —The Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck and the Institute of Islamic Studies of West Windsor — joined together to form one team to support NAMI Mercer to fight stigma, and encourage compassionate dialogue among diverse faith communities. Co-captains Heidi Jamieson and Lubna Khan led 44 walkers who together raised \$7,415, the third highest team total. Overall, 54 teams comprising about 1,000 walkers are expected to raise \$132,000, more than any previous year. Team Robbinsville raised \$11,000 and was also this year’s largest with more than 55 walkers. Team Janssen CNS broke a Mercer County record by raising more than \$30,000 this year.

Young Adults Share Their Personal Stories to Fight Stigma

NAMI Mercer recently launched a program for high school students called “Spotlight Speaker Series.” Young adults share their personal stories about living with a mental health condition with teen audiences, hoping to prompt open and meaningful conversations about mental health issues and challenges.

NAMI Mercer made three pilot presentations at Montgomery High School this spring that were well received. As a result, the school counselor and several students attended our Walk on May 6, and we are planning to screen “No Letting Go” at the school in the fall.

In September 2016, we partnered with Robbinsville High School to show this award-winning film about a real family’s struggle to help a teenage son affected by bipolar disorder.



L to r: Nicole Pontarollo (Intern, Montgomery HS), Stephanie Brown (NAMI Mercer speaker), Christine Grossman (Student Assistance Coordinator, Montgomery HS).

Stephanee Brown, NAMI Mercer Ambassador Extraordinaire

By Madeline Monheit

Since 2012, when she was first crowned “Miss Trenton,” Stephanie Brown has had the honor of tossing out the first ball at the Trenton Thunder Game on Mother’s Day. This May, however, Stephanie asked “to change it up” by throwing the pitch with her mother, Denise. More significantly, instead of wearing her pageant crown and sash, she and her mom wore their NAMIWalks t-shirts, and the announcer boomed, “They are here to support NAMI Mercer for Mental Health Awareness Month.”

“It sounded like the perfect opportunity to make my mom feel special on Mother’s Day and also to raise awareness about Mental Health Awareness Month to a large audience,” explained Stephanie. “The Walk’s baseball theme of ‘Strike Out Stigma’ was a bonus this year.”

Stephanee has held pageant titles for the past five years: Miss Trenton 2012-2014; Miss East Coast and Miss NJ Sweetheart 2015; National Garden Miss Ambassador 2016; and, most recently, National Garden Miss 2017.

Unlike other pageants, National Garden Miss was developed to give young ladies the opportunity to serve their community through volunteering. “It is not a beauty competition. There are no swimwear modeling or

talent requirements,” said Stephanie. Winners are selected based on their speaking abilities, poise and confidence on and off stage, and the work they do for their communities.

Stephanee is dedicated to using her victory to fight stigma. “One thing I love is that my crown and sash are both green, which is the color of the mental health awareness ribbon,” remarked Stephanie. “Wearing a big crown and a sparkly sash really gets people’s attention, and having the title of National Garden Miss 2017 has opened so many doors for me to promote NAMI Mercer. I am forever grateful for this opportunity.”

In 2015, just days after being crowned Miss New Jersey Sweetheart at the Majesty Loft in Montclair, Stephanie gave an inspiring speech at the NAMI Mercer Walk kickoff dinner. She spoke openly about her personal struggle with anxiety and about her passionate support for NAMI’s work.

“In high school, I was challenged with symptoms every day--headaches, hot flashes, shaking, and dizziness,” she recalled. “I didn’t play sports because I thought I had asthma.” For Stephanie, speaking in public takes great courage.

Stephanee earned another distinction this year as the winner of the Alyssa Morgan Lego (AML) Humanitarian Award that recognizes young women in the Tri-State Area for



outstanding character and a dedication and commitment to service. She learned about this competition at a fundraising event for Autism Speaks called “Shop. Sell. Strut!”

Stephanee received two strong letters of recommendation for the AML Humanitarian Award. One was from Dr. Lisa Allen, clinical manager of Oncology at the Capital Health Center for Comprehensive Breast Care. In October, Stephanie collects blankets, hats, and scarves for patients undergoing treatment as part of her “Hope in a Blanket” mission. Thus far, she has donated more than 100 items.

The other letter was submitted by NAMI Mercer Executive Director Janet Haag, who wrote: “Stephanee is a true humanitarian whose compassion and commitment to making life better for others shines through in everything she does!”

Carol Rickard, Guide on the Road to Recovery

Carol Rickard, LCSW, brings two new offerings to the NAMI Mercer community, and both can be utilized from the comfort of your own home. First, there's her new book, **HELP—How to Help Those Who DON'T Want It**, designed to give family and friends the tools to guide a resistant loved one into treatment.

"You can't just say to someone, 'you need help or you need medication,'" she said. Rickard explores the themes of "Stages of Change" developed by Carlo C. DiClemente and J. O. Prochaska, using a fictional character George and the image of a river.

"George can't see the river, so it doesn't do any good to talk to George about the river." Instead, Rickard explains to the reader what change is. She then introduces the tools to become a "river guide" to help navigate on the river of change.

For Rickard, mental health and physical health are connected, and this link is reflected in her book's scope. George addresses people who have diabetes, high blood pressure, and other concerns, including opioid addiction.

Rickard is also piloting a new monthly telephone chat through NAMI Mercer called "Ask a Social Worker." It's an opportunity to call in and ask Rickard a question about mental health, wellness, or navigating the system of care.

Rickard's expertise comes from more than 25 years of work in programs at Hampton Hospital and Capital Health's now defunct program, Milestones.

"You shouldn't have to get so sick

that you end up in a psychiatric unit to learn tools to get well," she said. All of her work reflects a desire to give families what she believes has been missing in programs outside of inpatient or partial inpatient settings: skill building.

Rickard likes visual and concrete approaches to teaching these skills. For example, she says "people are like soda bottles." If you shake up a soda bottle, you have to stop the shaking, and you have to allow for release.



People may know enough to suppress the agitation or walk away from a conflict. The mistake they make, however, is that they never allow for a release. They are left with emotions that later either implode or explode..

One release technique Carol suggests is called "Dump and Destroy."

"You take a piece of paper, set a timer, and write at a certain time of day. You can do it in the morning, before you leave work, or before bed."

The key, she said, is that you do not read over what you have written. Doing so only "reloads" the emotions. When you have finished writing, you have to destroy what you have "dumped."

"I make dump boxes," she said. You can also shred or rip up the paper.

When Rickard began her job as a recreational therapist at Hampton Hospital in 1991, she suffered from undiagnosed major depression. For several years, her exhaustion was so great that she went for mono tests every few months. There were some days when she'd get to work and need to go home. All she wanted to do was sleep. And she stopped going to the gym.

"For me, the gym was my life."

After years of seeking a physical cause for her fatigue, she started to suspect that she had major depression. A diagnosis soon followed.

"My recovery happened inside out—people affected by depression often are admitted to a hospital. I went to work in a hospital," she said remarking on what she called a miracle.

Carol returned to school and earned her Master's in Social work in 2000 at the age of 38. In 2008, she founded WellYOUUniversity, LLC, a health education company dedicated to empowering individuals in achieving lifelong wellness and now dedicates herself full time to her business, to teaching, and to writing. Ever since she participated in the first NAMI Mercer Walk ten years ago, Carol has been a dedicated volunteer.

Award

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Mercer "helps families to live, families to understand, families to nurture and help."

"If it hadn't been for NAMI," Barb admits, "I don't know what would have happened to me. Meeting so many great people who really know what it's like has made all the difference." The film concludes on a high note — the possibility of recovery for all loved ones, as well

as the urgent need for everlasting hope. As Kimme exhorts in the film's final clip, "You never, ever give up hope! Ever!"

Passage to Hope resulted from a partnership of NAMI Mercer with Princeton Community Television (PCTV). PCTV selected NAMI Mercer as one of its 2016 "Community Partners" for special training and help in shooting and editing a high-quality film product for use as a promotional and educational vehicle.

The video project had four goals: to give true voice to the family experience; to involve NAMI Mercer members in the

production; to help elevate NAMI Mercer's communications platform; and to enter the product in a film festival for wider viewing.

"Our project accomplished all of our goals," enthused Janet Haag, executive director. "What an honor and affirmation for NAMI Mercer's film to win best documentary, which speaks volumes to the talent and dedication of our NAMI Mercer film team." The film is now permanently posted on the NAMI Mercer website and will be a valuable tool for education, advocacy and community outreach.

What's a CRM System?

By Karen Marquis

We live in a world of rapidly multiplying acronyms, the meanings of which are lost to many of us. Have you heard of CRM? In a business environment, CRM stands for Client Relationship Management; in our non-profit world, it stands for Constituent Relationship Management. A CRM software system helps organizations keep track of and develop deeper relationships with those who are important to their mission, sustainability, and growth.

For many years, NAMI Mercer utilized a custom-designed database with Microsoft Access as the underlying architecture. The programming and maintenance of this specialized system were performed by an extremely talented and dedicated volunteer, Nancy Behrendt. We are extremely grateful to Nancy for creating a tool that served us well for so long.

In 2015, however, things began to change for NAMI Mercer. Our physical server was antiquated and vulnerable to failure, potentially leaving us without access to our critical data. The fire in our office two years ago convinced us that we urgently needed to move our information resources from a physical server to

“the cloud.” By purchasing cloud storage from a provider, we would ensure that our data would be safe from equipment failure and disaster, backed up automatically, and always accessible from any location.

We faced two serious challenges in moving to a cloud platform: compatibility with our customized Microsoft Access database and dependence on Nancy's technical expertise. The time had come for us to upgrade to a current system with broader support.

We were very fortunate to receive a fundraising capacity-building grant from the Princeton Area Community Foundation's Path to Impact program specifically to migrate our database to a state-of-the-art CRM system. After evaluating several options, we chose DonorPerfect, software developed by SofterWare Inc. of Horsham, PA. DonorPerfect is highly rated for organizations of our size by Idealware, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that provides impartial, thoroughly researched resources to help nonprofits benefit from technology.

DonorPerfect delivers much of the functionality we need to be more efficient and effective with our development efforts, including tracking gifts, pledges and payments

using credit card information; maintaining and sending acknowledgments and other correspondence from within the system; identifying relationships among constituents such as family members, employers, and houses of worship; linking constituent lists with our Constant Contact email distribution system; streamlining class registration and event ticketing through links from forms on our website; and ultimately synchronizing donations records in Donor Perfect with our financial records in QuickBooks (our accounting system).

As a result of this improved functionality, staff will no longer need to maintain multiple spreadsheets that contain “silos” of disconnected information. We will be able to develop giving plans tailored to the preferences and resources of our constituents instead of sending multiple “asks” throughout the year. And, using the “soft credit” feature, we will be better able to acknowledge those who help us grow our organization through employer matching programs or by connecting us with new donors through their walk fundraising efforts.

While no CRM is perfect, DonorPerfect seems extremely well-suited to NAMI Mercer.

Shop on AmazonSmile and Amazon will donate to NAMI Mercer on your behalf

Amazon.com is the largest online retailer in the U.S. with more than 183,000,000 unique visitors to its website each month. We were pleased to learn that the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the price of your purchases to the charity of your choice. Because many of our supporters have selected NAMI Mercer as their AmazonSmile beneficiary, we already have received approximately \$250 in donations from the foundation.

Here is how to make NAMI Mercer the beneficiary:

1. Using your Internet browser, visit smile.amazon.com on your computer,

phone or tablet.

2. Sign in using your amazon.com account email and password.

3. On your first visit to smile.amazon.com, you will be prompted to select a charitable organization to receive donations.

4. Amazon will confirm your selection by email and automatically make a donation on all your future eligible purchases. You will be able to see how much NAMI Mercer has benefited from your own purchases and how much money NAMI Mercer has received overall.

5. Purchases not made using an Internet browser (for example, using

the Amazon Shopping App, Kindle Store, FireTV, Amazon Dash, or Amazon Echo) currently are not eligible for donations.

6. You may not claim a tax deduction for the amount that AmazonSmile donates on behalf of your purchase.

Please take advantage of this simple and automatic way to support NAMI Mercer every time you shop, at no cost to you. Share the opportunity with your friends on Facebook, Twitter or via email. We applaud Amazon for its generous support of charitable organizations like ours.

NAMI Mercer to welcome renowned pianist Tanya Gabrielian for four days of wellness activities

By John Haag

Renowned pianist, Tanya Gabrielian, will teach and perform at several NAMI Mercer events during Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) in October.

A Julliard-trained classical musician, Tanya has played in places many young musicians dream about: Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and The Sydney Opera House. She has performed with The Los Angeles Philharmonic, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and The Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

As part of our MIAW commemoration, Tanya will teach a masterclass for the music students at The Pennington School on Thursday, October 5, and she will play for the patients at Trenton Psychiatric Hospital on Friday, October 6. During Harvest of Hope on Saturday, October 7, Tanya and John Haag (Executive Director of Pro Musicis and husband of NAMI Mercer Executive Director Janet Haag) will lead a Music Wellness Workshop. The weekend will wrap up on Sunday, October 8, with Tanya as a special guest at our Patrons' Reception and then performing a benefit concert for NAMI Mercer at The Pennington School Student Center. This concert is

being offered in partnership with Pro Musicis and The Pennington School.

Tanya has played piano from the time she was three but didn't feel called to be a musician and chose instead to attend Harvard University for biomedical engineering. On a whim, she took a year off to study music in London, but didn't find the Royal Academy to be a good fit. She then had an accident that changed her life. While sparring during martial arts training, she slipped on a puddle of sweat and rather than risk hurting her hands, she badly twisted her spine as she fell forward and hit her head, hard. She spent the next month shuffling between hospitals, feeling isolated and alone and discovered that listening to music elevated her from her discomfort. Overwhelmed by the power of music to provide encouragement and hope, she decided to commit her life to bringing this same joy to others.

It is no surprise then that Tanya was selected to receive the prestigious Pro Musicis award, joining a group of visionary concert artists who awaken the human spirit wherever they perform. While living in California, Tanya connected with NAMI Santa Clara and developed a musical program to address the stigma around mental ill-



Tanya Gabrielian

ness and break the cliché that art comes from tragedy. She plays a repertoire by composers who have been affected by mental illness, portraying art as a celebration of life and demonstrating that every person, regardless of personal circumstances, can contribute beauty to the world.

More information about Tanya and John's music workshop at Harvest of Hope on October 7 will be available this summer. Tanya's concert at The Pennington School on October 8 will be open to the public. Goodwill offerings will be solicited to support NAMI Mercer's important work.

NAMI Mercer Office is Moving

The building in Mercer Mall where NAMI Mercer currently resides has been sold, and we have been asked by the new owners to move by year-end, if possible.

Since we have a valid lease until June 2018, the new owner will compensate us for vacating early.

An office relocation team was formed with Janet Haag, Bill Wolfe, Tom Nied, and John Marsland as team leader. Jason Benson, a tenant broker with JLL (a commercial real estate services company) is assisting us with our search.

Selection criteria for our new office include: welcoming, home-like atmosphere; good aesthetics; ample safe parking; proximity to public transportation; larger conference room and socializing space; a kitchenette; quieter staff work spaces, and rent within budget.

We have identified a very promising location in nearby Hamilton that satisfies all of our requirements. A bid proposal is due from our prospective landlord by May 31. We will have a complete update ready for our Annual Meeting on June 26.

**Watch for NAMI
Mercer's
new website,
coming soon.**

NAMI Mercer

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Irish Colleen dances for NAMI Walk

By Liz Hagen

Colleen Garrahan danced for the audience at NAMI Mercer's Walk kickoff dinner at ETS on Tuesday, April 4. It was a pleasure to watch this talented young lady hold our attention with her graceful, assured technique, and yes, she is half Irish!

Colleen began dancing at age four, stopped for an interval, and continued later. She works out three or four times a week at the Talk of the Town dance studio in Hamilton and spends three or four hours at each practice session, perfecting her technique under the supervision of Miss Kimberlee Antinoro.

Colleen studies a wide range of dance forms — classical ballet, contemporary dance, lyrical dance, tap dance, musical theater, jazz, and hip-hop. She gave her first public performance at age five. "I still get nervous," she said. However, at the kickoff dinner, she gave no sign of nerves!

The studio chooses costumes for its dancers. Colleen wore a storm trooper's mask at a recent hip-hop performance, a lion costume for a musical theater performance based on "The Lion



Colleen in her lion costume

Guard," and a gauzy, creepy costume for a modern dance routine.

Colleen would like to make a career in dance, although she realizes this is a tough, competitive route to take, and there will be many rejections. She is now in the 9th grade at Steinert High School in Hamilton. After graduation, she hopes to attend Mercer County Community College and is encouraged by her recent selection as a student teacher, which opens the door to a possible career.

Colleen's mother Sherry is an admissions assistant at the Princeton Theological Seminary. She was

introduced to NAMI by a co-worker who is a member. According to Sherry, Colleen's two older sisters, Amanda and Samantha, both danced, and Amanda will also have Yoga certification this summer.

Mental illness is a part of the family's genetic heritage, and all three sisters have histories of depression and anxiety. The idea of a solo dance career came to Colleen as she began to feel better and wanted people around her to know there was hope. "I have a strong desire to keep reaching out," she said.

Cranbury School Spirit Supports NAMI

Students at Cranbury School raised more than \$500 for NAMI Mercer earlier this year during the school's Spirit Week in February.

Brigid Hughes, an 8th grader at the school who serves on the Student Council, nominated NAMI Mercer as the beneficiary of the event. "I am incredibly proud of her for suggesting NAMI and even happier that the other students saw this as an important charity and voted to make NAMI [Mercer] the winner!" said her mother,

Tara Hughes, a NAMI Mercer volunteer. Cranbury students watched a video in their homerooms to raise awareness about mental illness and learn about NAMI Mercer's work in the community. Homeroom teams then engaged in friendly competition to raise money.

Other schools that collected donations for NAMI Mercer this spring were Montgomery High School, the Hun School, and Hunterdon Central Regional High School.

NAMI Mercer Programs

Educational Programs

Family-to-Family Class: a twelve-session class for family members of adults living with mental illness. Thursdays, Sept. 14 – Dec. 7 (No class Nov. 23), 6:30 – 9 p.m. at the NAMI Mercer Center.

In Our Own Voice and Spotlight Speaker Series: booked presentations to promote awareness through personal stories of recovery.

Parents and Teachers as Allies: booked presentation for educators, parents and school personnel.

Public Education: local experts speak on a mental health topic of interest to the community. Locations vary. Refer to namimercer.org for details.

Support Groups

NAMI Connection: recovery support group for adults living with mental illness. Second and

fourth Tuesdays, 7 – 8:30 p.m. at the NAMI Mercer Center. No registration required.

IFSS/NAMI: support group for families of adults living with mental illness. Mondays, 5:15 – 6:45 p.m. at Lawrence Rd. Presbyterian Church. Tuesdays, 5:15 – 6:45 p.m. at the NAMI Mercer Center. Thursdays, 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Kingsbury Towers, 1 Kingsbury Sq., Trenton (facilitated in English and Spanish).

WRAP® Workshop: an eight-session Wellness and Recovery Action Plan program for individuals living with mental illness. Wednesdays, Sept. 27 – Nov. 15, 6 – 8:30 p.m. at the NAMI Mercer Center. WRAP® Online Support: Thursdays, 7 – 8 p.m. To connect to the meeting from your phone please call: 605-562-3185 Enter the meeting ID 149 245 4791 when prompted. Holiday WRAP® Sat. Nov. 18, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Just Friends Social Support Group Meet & Greet (age 30+): first Wednesdays, 3 – 4 p.m. at the NAMI Mercer Center. Confirm atten-

dance. Participation in a Meet & Greet is required prior to participation in Just Friends social activities.

Becoming Friends Social Support Group: (ages 18 – 30) second Fridays, 6 – 8 p.m. at the NAMI Mercer Center.

Overcoming Social Anxiety Workshop (offered in partnership with Find Your Voice) Fall, TBA

Ask the Social Worker Teleconference: first Mondays, 7 – 8:30 p.m. Call: 605-562-3185. Enter the meeting ID 149 245 4791 when prompted.

Volunteer Orientation: first Wednesdays, 5 – 6 p.m. at the NAMI Mercer Center. Confirm attendance.

All NAMI Mercer support groups, workshops, and classes, are provided free of charge to participants. Registration is required for education classes, WRAP, and the Overcoming Social Anxiety Workshop.

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Joining Forces With Like-Minded Organizations

NEW – Workshop on Overcoming Social Anxiety

NAMI Mercer has found a valuable new partner in Find Your Voice, a local nonprofit dedicated to promoting full participation in life for people living with Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD). SAD is the third most common mental health condition, affecting 7–8 percent of the population or an estimated 19.2 million Americans. Find Your Voice provides ongoing services and outreach to those with SAD in the form of self-help/support groups; education in treatment options as well as adjunctive therapeutic techniques; and other skill development.

The spring session of the Social Anxiety Workshop, led by Rachel Adkinson, is now underway. Some of

you may have met Rachel at the Walk. The usual fee for this workshop is \$30 but members of NAMI Mercer were invited to participate free of charge. We are pleased to report there are currently nine in this group, four of them from our community. It is exciting for us to be forging new relationships and expanding our program offerings.

NAMI Mercer and Find Your Voice hope to offer the workshop series again in the fall. If



L to r: Rachel Adkinson (workshop facilitator), Carl Gaspar and John Watson.

you are interested, please call the NAMI Office at 609-799-8994.

NAMI Mercer to Set Up Hearing Voices Network Group

By Tom Pyle

NAMI Mercer is considering forming a new kind of support group for its members. It is called “Hearing Voices Network (HVN),” a peer-focused forum for people who hear voices and their loved ones to share information, support and understanding.

HVN promises to be a helpful adjunct and even an alternative to voice-suppressing anti-psychotic medications which have inconsistent impact and severe side effects. NAMI Mercer is currently forging local partnerships with other like-minded groups to bring an HVN group to Mercer County.

“I’m excited by the prospect of an HVN group organized by NAMI Mercer,” said Board member Tom Pyle, who has a son who hears voices. “The idea of a specially dedicated support group for loved ones with this kind of experience is compelling and much needed,” he added.

NAMI Mercer Executive Director Janet Haag welcomes the HVN initiative. “This new support group at NAMI Mercer offers us a wonderful opportunity for partnership with

other leading community mental health providers and advocates,” she noted.

Hearing voices is a type of auditory hallucination. These hallucinations include familiar sounds, unusual noises, and human voices. Voices can be pleasant or threatening. They can be associated with some psychiatric disorders, including bipolar disorder, psychotic depression, schizoid and schizotypal personality disorders, and schizophrenia. For those with psychiatric disabilities and their families, hearing voices can lead to unease, distress, and in extreme cases, acting out. Persons who hear voices are often stigmatized.

HVNs are organizations for voice hearers and their family members and providers. Members may or may not have a psychiatric diagnosis. Networks promote an alternative approach, where voices are not necessarily seen as signs of mental illness. Rather, proponents regard hearing voices as a meaningful and understandable, although unusual, human variation.

The HVN movement was developed in Holland in 1987 by Dr. Marius Romme. In the past 20 years, HVNs

have been established in 29 countries. Some are exclusive to individuals who hear voices and their families; others are supported by mental health professionals. HVN USA was founded in 2010.

HVN is still relatively new in New Jersey. The largest known organizer of such groups in the Garden State is Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey (CSPNJ), the large and longstanding community mental health services organization led and run by consumers. CSPNJ currently has organized seven HVN groups, the nearest being at CSPNJ’s self-help center in New Brunswick.

To develop HVN locally, NAMI Mercer is exploring a partnership with CSPNJ, as well as Oaks Integrated Care, Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS) Mercer, the Urban Mental Health Alliance in Trenton, and the Transition Mission Wellness Center at Trenton Psychiatric Hospital.

For those interested in learning more, there will be an HVN workshop at the NAMI Mercer Harvest of Hope Wellness Conference on October 7.

Partnering with the Arts for Conversations on Mental Health

Playwright David Lee White understands firsthand the challenges of living with a mental health condition. Like many creative professionals, he draws on his own life experience to tap into the emotions with which an audience will resonate. His play “Fixed” confronts the anger, guilt, and uncertainty that three friends encounter as they try to help a former classmate affected by mental illness.

“Fixed” was performed by Passage Theatre Company from May 4 – 21 at the Mill Hill Playhouse in Trenton.

White’s goal is to get people to talk about their feelings, share their own experiences, and reach greater understanding and acceptance. To this end, a post-performance dialogue followed each show during the play’s run. NAMI Mercer Board member and Chair of the Advocacy Committee Tom Pyle effectively led two of these audience conversations.

NAMI Mercer and White have been collaborating for more than a year. On April 29, 2016, the New Jersey Performing



L to r: Damion Parran (managing director, Passage Theatre), Janet Haag (executive director, NAMI Mercer), David Lee White (playwright), Tom Pyle (member, NAMI Mercer Board).

Arts Center (NJ PAC) hosted a stage reading and audience discussion of “Fixed” (then titled “Sanism”), with NAMI Mercer as the beneficiary of all proceeds from the event.

“Fixed” was one of three plays commissioned by NJ PAC’s Stage Exchange (NJStage X), a program to support the production of original theatrical works about social issues in NJ.

In another collaborative venture related to “Fixed,” NAMI Mercer joined Passage Theater Company and several other local partners, including Shiloh Baptist Church, Urban Mental Health Alliance, Council for Relationships, Westminster Presbyterian Church, and Thomas Edison State University to lead a community conversation on mental health directed toward minority communities.

“Healing the Divide: Eliminating the Stigma of Mental Illness” was held on May 3 at Thomas Edison University. A panel including NAMI Mercer volunteer Bonnie Williams engaged participants in considering how communities can make a positive difference in people’s lives during their journeys of recovery.



Seated: Kimme Carlos (Urban Mental Health Alliance).

Standing l – r: Rev. Dr. Darrell Armstrong (Shiloh Baptist Church), Bonnie Williams (NAMI Mercer), Ray Fisher (Council for Relationships), Damion Parran (Passage Theatre), Neil Stevens and Michele Madiou (Mercer County Dept. of Mental Health), Darren Freedom Green (Trenton community activist), Rev. Maureen Gerald (Momentum Counseling), and Janet Haag (NAMI Mercer).

NAMI Mercer Teams Up with Mental Health Association to Expand WRAP®

NAMI Mercer and The Mental Health Association in New Jersey (MHANJ) are partnering this year to offer intensive WRAP® Seminar I and Seminar II, specific training for WRAP® facilitators.

The goal of this joint initiative is to increase the number of certified facilitators

across the state who can bring WRAP®, an evidence-based practice, to the communities they serve through various mental health providers. MHANJ is coordinating with the Copeland Center (where WRAP was founded) and working to secure participants.

We were fortunate that Michael Leotis, referred by MHANJ, joined Akavar Dylutra in leading the Spring WRAP® Workshop for NAMI Mercer. As part of this partnership, we are also hosting a one-day orientation meeting for Consumer Connections core training.

NAMI Mercer to Host Clinical Training on the Psychological Impact of Social Media

On Friday, July 28, we will host clinical training presented by Behavioral Health Matters (BHM) on Social Media’s Influence on Self-Regulation and Self-Esteem at the NAMI Mercer Center. Sara Martino, PhD, NCC, LPC, will be the instructor.

BHM provides training on mental health, substance use, intellectual disabilities and co-occurring disorders to service providers to enhance treatment outcomes for service recipients. Attendees at the training on July 28 will earn six CEUs.

We are looking forward to this wonderful opportunity to build relationships with clinicians and promote NAMI Mercer. Additionally, our community will benefit by having a public education session offered on this topic within the next several months.