



WOW AWARD

Gianna Santoro



NAMI Mercer was pleased to present Gianna Santoro with our inaugural WOW Award in recognition of her extraordinary contribution to increasing awareness, reducing stigma, and promoting youth mental health.

Although Gianna first became aware of her depression during her junior year of high school, she hid her suffering because of shame and guilt. An exceptional student with a loving family and lots of friends, Gianna believed that she had nothing to complain about. It was only when she hit rock bottom that she confided in a trusted teacher. And so began Gianna’s road to recovery and mission to help others.

One of Gianna’s great acts of courage was to tell her story at a “This Is My Brave” production in Philadelphia. Since 2014, nearly 800 individuals across the U.S. and Australia have shared their personal stories of recovery from depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses at more than 65 “This Is My Brave” shows. Gianna also chronicled her experiences on *OC87 Recovery Diaries* and *The Mighty*, two online mental health communities.

About two years ago, Gianna reached out to NAMI Mercer at an opportune time—the launching of “Ending the Silence”. This mental health awareness program comprises three interactive presentations—for middle and high schools students, for their families, and for school personnel. Key to each presentation is a young adult presenter who shares his/her journey of recovery, a perfect role for Gianna, who has been a mainstay of our program.

Congratulations to Gianna for graduating from Rutgers University last May with a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree. She is currently working as a domestic violence advocate at Catholic Charities’ Providence House and will enter a Master of Social Work program at the University of Pennsylvania next July.

