

During the 2023 legislative session both Sam and Holly Stevens, NAMI NH Public Policy Director, could be seen with their orange lobbyist badges as they worked diligently to testify on legislation that would impact the mental health community.

Wearing the orange badge of a lobbyist signifies you will bring the data and a strong, organized voice to the hearing. And beyond the statistics there is an extreme value to constituents sharing their stories. Personal stories are impactful and relatable; when people volunteer their time to come and sit, sign in or even testify. Sam recalled an early session where a 13-year-old testified and the impact it had on him seeing advocacy in motion.

Sam's own journey with politics began with awareness. He reflects on listening to rock music with his dad. And as a Coast Guard family Sam also reflects on seeing the environmental impact of an oil spill 30 years later. Sam cares about the environment, the effect of work life balance and is passionate about protecting the rights of those who are marginalized. When discussing marginalized populations he mentioned mental health, LGBTQIA+ and the populations systematized.

As an individual with mental illness, Sam has been working to own his mental illness "label." Sam turned to art to help him, and he went to college to study writing, which he used to process his feelings. And his writing has helped him develop his own voice as well as the narrative for many during this past legislative session.

Sam recommends the first step toward advocacy with NAMI NH is to sign up for the public policy alert, [Take Action - NAMI New Hampshire \(naminh.org\)](https://www.naminh.org), which provides a weekly update January – June on the most pressing topics for the week. Many subscribers were moved to action after reading about a bill and would connect with Sam and Holly to find out the next steps in the process.

As the legislative season was winding down in June, Sam was already hard at work on how to prepare for the 2024 season. Sam was a recent guest on the 603 stories podcast, The Impact of Legislation on Mental Health, where he provided an overview on how to learn more about the process, advocating and how this legislative session may have adversely affected many with the language and nature of the bills.

Sam is looking forward to the upcoming State House Tour where he and Holly will be answering questions and sharing stories from their experiences during the legislative session. Sam said a lot of the programs and the ins and outs have been learning along the way. "This has been incredible for me," said Sam as he reflected on hitting the ground running and experienced new things as he dove head in.

Sam and Holly will be working in conjunction with the NH Family Network Coordinator to deliver educational programs this fall. Please refer to the State House Tour and It's Your Move. Our goal is to improve awareness and confidence to enable NH residents to feel confident with however they may choose to advocate. There are many steps along the way and NAMI NH is here to support the delivery of information and training.