



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

For additional information

Contact: Maggie Luo

Associate Director of Outreach & Communications

Phone: (732) 940-0991

Email: [mluo@naminj.org](mailto:mluo@naminj.org)

November 16, 2022

**NAMI New Jersey Celebrates 20 Years of  
In Our Own Voice!**

North Brunswick, NJ – The National Alliance on Mental Illness of New Jersey (NAMI NJ) is proud to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its first presentation of the NAMI Signature Program, **NAMI In Our Own Voice (IOOV)**, in 2002. NAMI NJ will host three virtual events, on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>, to honor this significant landmark for the program.

*“On the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of In Our Own Voice, I would like to thank all the presenters who have shared their stories and their lives across the state,”* Meredith Masin Blount, Executive Director of NAMI NJ said. *“Their bravery, to share their lives living with a mental illness, has helped break stigma across New Jersey.”*

IOOV is a powerful NAMI Signature Presentation that aims to change attitudes, assumptions, and stereotypes about people living with mental health conditions. Two trained presenters with lived experience of a mental health condition, talk openly about their experiences and how they have found pathways to hope and healing. They talk about “What Happened,” “What Helps” and “What is Next.” Audience members have the opportunity to ask questions, learn more about mental health, and challenge misconceptions.

*“Since forever, ‘others’ have been describing the personal journey of people living with a serious and persistent mental health condition,”* NAMI NJ President, Mark T. Williams, BSN, RN-BC, said, *“Imagining that they, and not the person with the lived experience, know better the daily struggle of discrimination, blame, fighting societal stereotypes and the stigma so often associated with having a mental health condition. The value of having that personal experience shared directly by people living the challenges cannot be overstated. Congratulations to NAMI NJ and all the voices that share our vision. Well done.”*

Jennifer Hughes, LCSW, NAMI NJ Associate Director of Program Quality Assurance, shared, *"IOOV was one of the first programs I viewed when I joined NAMI and it inspired me to be open about talking about my mental health journey. As a program director, I make it a priority to tell the community about this stigma-busting program. Our goal is to expand the reach of this program to more inpatient settings, corporate organizations, human resources, trades, and more."*

NAMI NJ hosted their first Spanish-language IOOV presentation in 2020. Since then, there have been 9 presentations across the state in collaboration with NAMI NJ en Español program. Post-presentation evaluations have shown that the program helps people feel less alone and individuals are more open to seeking help on their terms, which are key aspects of the self-help peer-led support that NAMI offers all around the country.

NAMI NJ Recovery Programs Director, Jay Yudof, witnessed the inception of this highly successful program in New Jersey as one of the first presenters. *"We have had an effective program running for 20 years,"* Yudof said. *"During this period, the wise and courageous presenters in the program have spoken to more than 3,550 groups, and reached 83,000 audience members across NJ."*

Many of our presenters say that sharing their story through the IOOV presentation has been a key part of their own recoveries.

*"Being an IOOV Presenter has helped me in so many ways along my recovery journey!"* said Viviana De Los Angeles, Spanish IOOV presenter and NAMI NJ's newly hired Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Programs Coordinator. *"Every time I tell my story, I heal a little more, as I am not afraid to share it and be judged. Also, this has allowed me to share with my Latinx community where mental health is not much talked about, especially among my family."*

In celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary landmark, NAMI NJ offers to the public three virtual events:

- On December 2nd at 7 p.m., all are welcome to hear from presenters about personal experiences while being active in IOOV.
- December 6th at 7 p.m., join NAMI Hudson for an online IOOV presentation.
- December 12th at 6 p.m., the NAMI NJ Dara Axelrod Expressive Arts Network will be hosting a celebration to include *IOOV: The Musical*

These are all opportunities to learn more about this effective anti-stigma program which offers free presentations about recovery all around our state and country.

To attend the December 2 event, click here:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZApfuCurDsvH9Q5kXRpXcDr3zpg9Ts7mywS>

To register for the December 6 IOOV presentation, hosted by NAMI Hudson, click here:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZModumrrj8vGtQNE3YXsYWKapBab\\_4Fo6-Y](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZModumrrj8vGtQNE3YXsYWKapBab_4Fo6-Y)

To register for the Expressive Arts Network Celebration on December 12, click here:  
<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEkf-mhrD4tGtRt5jcqa32PrNsw9CGskwR9>

Contact Jill at [ioov@naminj.org](mailto:ioov@naminj.org) to discuss or schedule a free live or virtual presentation. Learn more about the IOOV program at <https://naminj.org/programs/ioov>

###

**About NAMI NJ:** NAMI NJ is the State's largest grassroots organization dedicated to improving the quality of life of individuals and families affected by mental illness through education, support and advocacy. Local Affiliates in twenty-one counties provide self-help support and advocacy groups composed of individuals, family members, and friends affected by mental illness.