NAMI-NYS Advocacy Leads to Funded 988 System!
A Message from Board President, Mary Bartlett - January 2022

As the NAMI-NYS Board President, I am thrilled to help lead this organization with the Board of Directors as we take on another challenging year. As a Peer, I value each of you and what you bring to the NAMI-NYS Community. Through programs and services, support groups and advocacy events, your contributions make the community the resilient and welcoming place that it is. I enjoy hearing about all of the activities going on in each affiliate; it is truly inspiring.

There are always new ways to engage with your local affiliate or at the state level. If you haven’t dipped your toe in the advocacy waters, I encourage you to sign up for our virtual legislative action weeks, happening soon. It is a great opportunity to speak with elected officials about the important issues we are working on to improve the lives of New Yorkers. By sharing your story and your experiences, you bring policy issues down to a personal level and help legislators to know the impact that legislation can have on you and your family.

This year we have a special focus on caring for those that care for us, the mental health workforce. We want to ensure that they have the support they need to do their jobs, that they are compensated appropriately, that we retain the excellent people currently employed, and encourage people to start careers in the mental health space. The services so needed by our loved ones cannot be provided without a dedicated workforce to deliver them.

Planning for the Education Conference has begun and we hope to welcome you all to Albany in person this fall. We are working on content that will engage and educate you, alongside sessions to support and encourage you. If you have not been to an Education Conference before, consider attending this fall. It is a welcoming space that will leave you feeling inspired.

We look forward to bringing you exceptional content this year, both in-person and virtual, to sharing our stories on important policy initiatives, and to end the stigma around mental illness. If you’d like to step up your efforts and join a committee, we have many opportunities for you to bring your experiences and expertise to a working group.

I hope to see you at NAMICON in Atlanta this summer and at our Education Conference this fall. Most importantly, I wish you a happy, healthy 2022.

NAMI-NYS Board Members

NAMI-NYS welcomes its newest members to the Board of Directors. Ariel Coffman (NAMI Queens/Nassau) and Lucille Ettere (NAMI Putnam) returned to the Board following the most recent Board election, joining newcomer to the Board Arthur Covert (NAMI Champlain Valley). With vacancies to fill, the Board then appointed Pat Sine (NAMI Buffalo & Erie County) for a regular Board seat and Colleen Johnson (NAMI Delaware and Otsego) to the peer position. Welcome, All!

The Board also selected the officers for 2021-2022, with Mary Bartlett (NAMI Capital Region) as president, Martin Gromulat (NAMI Westchester) as 1st vice president, Julie LeClair Neches (NAMI Westchester) as 2nd vice president, Ann Canastra (NAMI Syracuse) as treasurer and Mary Jo Muscolino (NAMI Rochester) as secretary. The Board appointed Abraham Goldring (NAMI NYC-Metro) and Jayette Lansbury (NAMI Huntington) to be the at-large members of the NAMI-NYS Executive Committee.

We look forward to a productive and successful year!
A Message from the Executive Director, Wendy Burch

With the annual Education Conference and the Off the Mask fundraising and awareness event, NAMI-NYS had a busy fall season, and I am so grateful to all of those who contributed in some way to both events, whether as a sponsor or participant. As we enter 2022, we are already in the midst of planning for this year’s conference and Off the Mask, which we hope to combine, and we are always looking for talented people to help coordinate and recommend speakers, presenters and model ambassadors.

NAMI-NYS finished the year with an office move, and the staff is now settling into our new space. We are focusing on preparing NAMI-NYS’s legislative advocacy as the session opens, as well as awareness events around Mental Health Awareness Month and beyond. My hope is that we will have more NAMI supporters than ever before participating in both advocacy and awareness activities.

In this issue of the newsletter, we’ve included a lot of information around advocacy, in particular the efforts to effectively implement the 988 crisis response line, which is one of NAMI-NYS’s top priorities. More and more people are recognizing their struggles with mental health, and we want to ensure that they receive help from mental health professionals, who are trained to address these issues and provide the support and resources they need.

I would also like to commend the efforts of the local NAMI affiliates here in New York. As you’ll see from this issue of the newsletter, the local affiliates have been incredibly busy over the past several months, and I’m so pleased to be able to highlight some of their activities. We are grateful to have so many outstanding volunteers dedicating their time, empathy and expertise to help their community.

I hope you will all continue to lend your voice to advocacy, awareness, support and education around mental health and mental wellness as we enter a new year with a new set of challenges. As always, hope starts with you!

Meet the NAMI-NYS Staff

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NAMI-NYS recently moved offices after being located down the hill from the Capitol in Albany for more than 10 years. The new location is 150 Broadway, Menands, Suite 406, which is less than a 10 minute drive from our previous location on Pine Street in Albany. We appreciate everyone’s patience as we made the move between the two locations, especially during the last few weeks of December when we were in transition. The new office location includes a large conference room ideal for program trainings. We look forward to the time when we can all meet in person on a consistent basis again.
NAMI-NYS Committee Work

NAMI-NYS committees had a busy 2021, and following the December meeting, the Board of Directors assigned committee chairs for the upcoming year. The newly assigned chairs are setting schedules and recruiting members for their committees so that the work can continue throughout 2022.

Many of the committee titles make their mission clear, while others require a little further explanation. What follows is a short description for each of the NAMI-NYS committees. If you have an interest in contributing your expertise to a committee, please contact the NAMI-NYS office.

**Education Conference:** Planning and coordination for the annual education conference held in the fall.

**Government Affairs:** To identify advocacy issues and facilitate statewide advocacy for NAMI-NYS members and supporters.

**Development, Membership and Outreach:** Responsible for raising both awareness and funding to support the NAMI-NYS mission; includes the annual fundraiser, the Off the Mask Fashion and Art Show.

**Programs:** Responsible for overseeing the delivery of NAMI programs in NYS, assisting affiliates with program delivery and ensuring quality assurance and control of NAMI programs.

**Criminal Justice:** Responsible for identifying needs around the mental health/criminal justice interface and advocating for change in support of people with mental health issues who encounter the criminal justice system.

**Veterans Affairs:** Responsible for providing support for military veterans, service members and their families.

**Multicultural:** Responsible for providing support for people of different backgrounds and experiences, especially marginalized or underserved communities.

**Peer and Caregiver:** Works to identify ways to facilitate resilience and hope through peer support groups, whether caregiver to caregiver or peer to peer.

**Health and Wellness:** Identify and promote overall mental and physical wellness for people with mental health conditions and their families.

**Research:** Identify and promote the latest research and treatments for mental health conditions.

**Zero Suicide:** Reduce stigma, increase awareness, provide support and share education and resources around suicide through community partnerships.

**Reintegration:** Identify and advocate for reintegration of people with neurobiological illnesses into the community, with emphasis on the following: to have unlimited access to treatment, access to housing with wrap-around services, the opportunity to obtain jobs, help to start their own businesses and to be treated in appropriate facilities rather than being incarcerated or living on the streets.

NAMI-NYS also has a Youth Advisory Council comprised of young adults who support NAMI-NYS efforts through participating and coordination of NAMI-NYS activities, as well as serving as advisors to the Board on issues related to mental health affecting young people.

Committee work is often the backbone of any non-profit organization with limited or no staff, and NAMI-NYS is eager to work with supporters all over New York whose skills and talents are needed to help those whom we serve.
NAMI-NYS SUPPORTS

Across the state, trained NAMI volunteers bring peer-led programs to a wide variety of community settings, from churches to schools to NAMI Affiliates. With the unique understanding of people with lived experience, these programs and support groups provide outstanding free education, skills training and support.

NAMI-NYS is proud to announce that in 2021 we were able to hold 10 State Trainings virtually with a total of 87 graduates! We held 3 NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group Trainings with 28 graduates, 3 NAMI Family Support Group Trainings with 30 graduates, 1 Family-to-Family Training with 7 graduates, 1 NAMI Homefront with 5 graduates, and 2 NAMI Peer-to-Peer Trainings with 17 graduates. NAMI-NYS is grateful to trainers and graduates for their commitment to provide their communities with NAMI Signature Programs.

NAMI-NYS would like to remind the affiliates that we hold a Monthly NAMI-NYS Affiliate and Program Leader Call on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 12:00pm. The calls are recorded and disseminated to the affiliate leaders, along with the slides from the meeting. NAMI-NYS staff attend the calls to provide support and additional information. The purpose of these calls are to discuss NAMI Signature Programs and updates, state trainings, NAMI and NAMI-NYS updates, advocacy information, legislation information, and NAMI-NYS upcoming initiatives, events and campaigns. The meetings also offer local affiliate leaders the opportunity to exchange information and delve into discussions that affect them.

NAMI-NYS would also like to remind the affiliates that we hold a quarterly Program Coordinator Call and welcome topic suggestions. The calls provide a space to discuss NAMI-NYS forms, the NAMI-NYS Program Coordinator guide, State Trainings, virtual classes and support groups, Program Coordinator Mentorships, and other topics. We hope to have all the affiliates involved and attend these calls. NAMI-NYS wants to help you and your affiliate succeed with the NAMI Signature Programs and NAMI Support Groups. We are here for you and here to help!

The Disaster Distress Helpline: A New Peer Support Program Promoting Collective Healing

NAMI-NYS recently connected with the administrators of the Disaster Distress Helpline operated by Vibrant and delivered through SAMHSA, which provides mental health support to people who have survived natural and manmade disasters. They have provided some details around the program to NAMI-NYS for distribution to our members:

The Disaster Distress Helpline is now offering a free peer focused online peer support program, dedicated to providing individuals who have experienced a natural or human-caused disaster an opportunity to unite, heal and rebuild. The DDH Online Peer Support Communities (OPSC) are no-cost for members and are offered online via Facebook Groups. DDH Peer Supporters are staffed by Vibrant Emotional Health, and are available at varied days/hours, between the hours of 8:00am – 10:00pm Eastern Standard Time (EST).

Our Online Peer Support Communities are monitored 24/7/365 by an independently operated DDH networked crisis center to provide crisis support through Crisis Support Over Messenger. In this way, members are able to connect with a crisis counselor immediately if they are experiencing emotional distress and need crisis support. DDH Crisis Counselors use an intervention and evaluation approach, assisting community members to assess their level of emotional distress, and utilizing tools for de-escalation, collaborative problem solving and safety planning.

The DDH Online Peer Support Program requires peer supporters to receive a core training in fundamental principles of practice, amplifying skills such as active listening, compassionate curiosity, and utilizing growth recovery language while interacting with members. Additionally, peer supporters encourage self-efficacy by refraining from being problem solvers during their interactions with peers. Instead, they pose open-ended questions and help members create meaning from their own experiences. Peer supporters bring their lived experience and finely-honed skills in peer support social media moderation to enhance connection, community and resilience.

Peer Supporter Testimonial:
“The Disaster Distress Helpline’s Online Peer Supporter role doesn’t feel like a job but the beginning of an exciting, challenging and fulfilling career” states Deac Michelsohn, a Peer Supporter for the Survivors of Mass Violence DDH Facebook Group. “There is real collective healing happening here!”

The DDH Online Peer Support Communities launched its first group in June 2021, dedicated to Healthcare Workers impacted by Covid-19 to address the short and long-term effects of the pandemic. Healthcare workers were prioritized as a high risk for anxiety, depression, burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder due to a number of factors including exposure to the virus, overwork, lack of support, and family challenges. The DDH then launched a group for parents and caregivers impacted by Covid-19 to address the struggles parents have been experiencing, such as navigating their child’s education via online learning, unemployment, food insecurity, and working from home. Finally, the DDH has designated a group for Survivors of Mass Violence, since individuals with previous traumatic experiences are particularly vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic.

To connect to one of the three DDH Online Peer Support Communities, follow the links below:

Healthcare Workers Impacted by Covid-19
https://www.facebook.com/groups/healthcareworkerpeersupport

Parents and Caregivers Impacted by Covid-19
https://www.facebook.com/groups/parentsandcaregivers

Survivors of Mass Violence
https://www.facebook.com/groups/survivorsofmassviolence

The Disaster Distress Helpline (DDH) is a subnetwork of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, administered by Vibrant Emotional Health. For more information about the DDH:
https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline

For information about the Disaster Distress Helpline’s Online Peer Support Communities
https://strengthafterdisaster.org/peer-support/
NAMI Buffalo

NAMI Buffalo Celebrating 2021 and Looking Forward to 2022

NAMI Buffalo wrapped up a good year in 2021, despite the challenging times we’ve all been living in. Dedicated program leaders delivered Family Support Groups to the far corners of Erie and Niagara counties, with groups in Niagara Falls, Lockport, East Aurora, Hamburg and Buffalo. An online group was also held through the year for family members in hard to reach and underserved areas anywhere in western New York.

Five Family-to-Family classes took place, 3 online and 2 in-person. NAMI Buffalo outreach volunteers were at dozens of community, faith based and mental health-related events across the region from Spring into the Fall. NAMI Buffalo also hosted and participated in many online community forums, media discussion panels, and provider presentations. With Advocacy Committee Chair Ann Venuto’s leadership, last year we strengthened our work and are looking forward to Legislative Action Weeks in 2022.

In addition, NAMI Buffalo wrapped up 2021 with their Holidays for Kids project, led by Chair Mary Lou Bond, and delivered cheer and gifts to children and adolescents in area psychiatric care hospitals and residential treatment. They have organized this project for over 30 years now and would like to thank all those who work on collecting gifts and donations, and coordinating with the staff and front line heroes who make better holidays happen for the youth.

NAMI Buffalo shared, “It looks like 2022 will be no less challenging than last year – or less busy! For now, our full schedule of Family Support Groups is holding, despite leaders going through some especially hard times. Our volunteers care so much about helping others that they persist, even in the face of things like a house fire, COVID in their own home, and the struggles their own loved ones are experiencing. HelpLine calls keep coming and are responded to, support groups meet and people are so grateful, and many folks are eagerly looking forward to our Spring Family-to-Family class line-up. It is truly inspiring. There are many changes in store for us this year and we believe we will continue to rise and grow through them.”

Capital Region

NAMI Capital Region was hard at work this fall sharing NAMI’s mission and mental health resources with the Capital Region. With the help of Mary Beth Honsinger, Board President, Christine Baxter, Board member, Christine Rickeman, Program Coordinator, and Cassandra Farrugia, Development Specialist, Brenda Beach, volunteer, NAMI Capital Region has tabled at Greenville Flea Market, a SPAC concert, the United Methodist Church’s block party, the Dutchman’s Landing Catskill Food Truck Festival, the RITA Walk in Saratoga, the Out of Darkness Walk at Ditchman’s Landing, Unity House, Hudson Valley Community College’s Wellness Fair, the Children & Families Conference in Albany, and the Altamont American Legion for Veterans’ Resource Fair.

In addition, NAMI Capital Region, NY is happy to announce that NAMI Saratoga has merged with the affiliate. You can contact NAMI Capital Region at (518) 588-6949, namicapitalregionny@gmail.com or visit www.namicapitalregionny.org.

NAMI-NYS and Affiliate Helpline News

On June 9th, 2021, Sam Langstein, NAMI NYC-Metro Helpline Manager, and Christine Rickeman, NAMI-NYS Community Support Coordinator, held a presentation called “Call On Us: Taking Calls as a NAMI Affiliate.” The presentation’s purpose was to provide support for those who are taking helpline calls at the local affiliate level. The presentation was recorded and is posted on the NAMI-NYS website under educational materials.

NAMI-NYS is also very excited to announce that we have begun a Helpline Responders Support Group! This group is developed and led by Heidi Vandiver of NAMI Rockland County, Sam Langstein of NAMI NYC Metro and Christine Rickeman of NAMI NYS. The group meets every third Monday of the month at 12:30pm via zoom. The group provides our responders with a safe place to discuss the difficult situations and calls they face. Going forward, there will be topic meetings as well based on suggestions from the participants. To join our group, please contact your affiliate leader for the details.
Lisa Childers spoke at the NAMI NYS
“Off the Mask”

One significant aspect of NAMI-NYS’s Off the Mask event was the art show. As in previous years, Jennifer Laflin and Jeff Winseman from Albany Medical Center’s Behavioral Health Department helped to identify artists for the show, and this year NAMI-NYS was fortunate enough to have Brian Belt and Lisa Childers from NAMI Columbia County take the lead in curating the artwork. This was especially meaningful, as Brian and Lisa were instrumental in founding the gallery in Columbia County that features artwork done by those in recovery for mental health conditions. Lisa had these words at Off the Mask:

Hello, My name is Lisa Childers and I am a co-occurring disorder counselor for Mental Health Association of Columbia/Greene Counties. I am also a member of NAMI Columbia County.

My background is in fine art and art therapy and I feel blessed to work in a community that supports the arts as part of recovery. It allows me to have a broad spectrum of programs, through the psycho-educational platform. When I was hired, I discovered that most of the individuals I work with have art backgrounds, and as you look around at all the fine art presented tonight, you will find different levels of expression and talents, from 3D, to rendering, to working out fantasies of what their mental health gives to them. Sometimes it’s a gift, sometimes it’s a horror. For everyone, it’s a way to be understood and communicate.

Not everyone is an artist, but everyone can appreciate a non-threatening environment where sitting around and talking to peers, not feeling ashamed about who they are, what their past was and just may get help in working out what their future could be with a stable life. A large part of recovery is finding purpose, stability and a sense of belonging. Art or expressing oneself without shame is very much a part of that. It’s not the only tool in our mental health tool box, but it’s a necessary one.

Edgar Allen Poe wrote, “I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity.” Poe will often describe through his characters, a clear picture of his own depression, followed by the character getting inebriated. Stephen King wrote, “Misery is a book about cocaine, Anne Wilkes IS cocaine, my number one fan.” Both writers share co-occurring disorders and King is open about his recovery, stating that writing keeps him stable. As he continues to write, he now uses heroes who are in recovery, sometimes using the AA big book as a prop. I use horror writers as an example because I just happen to enjoy horror. But you can find many artists throughout history with co-occurring disorders, such as Van-Gogh, Hemingway, Amy Winehouse...just to name a few. And to get back to horror, Mary Shelley, author of Frankenstein, had bouts of depression, cured by the only available relief of the time-opium. Most artists, but not all, tend to have a high sensitivity, struggle with mental instability and addiction. We celebrate them, but society will also shun them. So as you view this art, see it as a form of communication to the outside world, a gift of beauty and complexity to how the mind works. And don’t forget to buy.

NAMI Columbia County

On December 11th, the Mental Health Awareness Gallery, supported by NAMI Columbia County and other partnering organizations, is holding weekly art classes for those with mental illness. The collaboration between the Art School and the Gallery is important to eliminate the stigma of mental illness, as those with mental illness are people with many gifts and talents. As one of the artists commented, “My goal in my work, as well as my life, is to heal myself and save the animals and the planet in order to find spirituality through nature.” Visit to namiccny.org to view the gallery and learn more.

NAMI Columbia County Holiday Gift Giving

At the end of 2021, NAMI Columbia County organized a gift giving event to spread a little joy in the community. Gifts of warm hats, gloves & socks and gift cards for pizza parties were brought to residents at MHA 900 Columbia Street, Hudson Community Apartments, Greenport Garden Apartments, Newman Community Residence in Copake, High Cliff in Catskill and Philmont Hearth housing.
Mid-Hudson

NAMI Mid-Hudson had an active fall and winter, planning and participating in several community events.

First, NAMI Mid-Hudson participated in the Eastern Dutchess Health Fair, held at Community Action in Dover Plains, NY on August 2, 2021. Renee Tancin, board member, hosted the table from 1 pm – 5 pm. Many people stopped by and outreach included Catholic Charities, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Sun River Health, Problem Gambling Resource Center, Project Hope, and Grace Smith House. Renee also tabled on August 3, 2021 at the National Night Out Event in Poughkeepsie, NY.

This annual community-building campaign promotes police-community partnerships and neighborhood camaraderie to make our neighborhoods safer, better places to live. NAMI Mid-Hudson provided resources and information to many attendees.

NAMI Mid-Hudson then partnered with a local nonprofit organization, I Am Beacon, for their annual 2021 Back 2 School block party. Heather, who works with NAMI Mid-Hudson, met with Brooke Simmons who coordinated the event for I Am Beacon, and provided information on signature programs such as the Family-to-Family class, and resources for NAMI Mid-Hudson were distributed within the 150 starter kit backpacks. I Am Beacon has been promoting Mental Health, and the founders, along with other employees, became Mental Health First Aiders certified by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

The event took place on Saturday, August 21, 2021, from 12:00 pm-4:00 pm. The Back 2 School Block Party was a huge success of community collaboration, with several agencies participating.

On Friday, September 24th NAMI Mid-Hudson’s Program Director, Jo Ann Brown bravely shared her experience of how suicide has impacted her life at Ulster County’s First Annual Suicide Prevention Forum. The aim of the Forum was to share information, resources, foster hope for recovery and raise suicide awareness.

NAMI Mid-Hudson would also like to extend a BIG THANK YOU to everyone involved in commemorating Suicide Awareness Month with the Fishkill Downstate Correctional Facility and its Employee Assistance Program Committee, who held an ice cream social on September 15th 2021 to raise money and provide informational packets for mental health services. $500 was raised and donated to NAMI Mid-Hudson at the event.

Finally, as recipients of funding from the Hannaford Foundation, representatives from the affiliate visited each of the six Hannaford locations in Dutchess and Ulster Counties. Each of the managers received a folder of information regarding NAMI Mid-Hudson provided by Heather Ann. Additional information and posters were provided in accordance with the requests received and one location even set up a presentation for the employees. One store featured “Men and Mental Health” utilizing the materials provided by NAMI Mid-Hudson. NAMI Mid-Hudson is excited to provide continued support to our local Hannaford’s. The Managers were grateful for the information provided for the Front Staff and Employees.
NAMI NYC-Metro

NAMI NYC-Metro Expanded Support Groups

We know that culturally competent and relevant mental health care makes a big difference in reaching communities who are more typically underserved in terms of health care. This is why we strive continuously to provide additional support for the many different communities across New York City.

Reaching these communities is an ongoing effort so we can provide even more New Yorkers with access to the resources they need and deserve. In that vein, NAMI NYC-Metro has initiated peer support groups that specifically serve some of these underserved members of the community.

Asian Americans & Pacific Islanders (AAPI)
- Peer support for anyone who identifies as Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) and living with mental illness or any mental health challenge. This includes South Asians, East Asians, Southeast Asians, North Asians, Middle East Asians, and Pacific Islanders. 1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month, 6 to 7:30pm ET via Zoom or phone.

Black Minds Matter
- Peer support for anyone who identifies as Black and living with mental illness or any mental health challenge. “It’s great to be a part of a support group specific to African Americans. This is a missing and welcomed piece. I appreciate the uniqueness of speaking with others like me.” Every 2nd and 4th Friday of the month, 6 to 7:30pm ET via Zoom or phone.

Familiares y Amistades
- Our Spanish-language support group for Spanish-speaking family members. 3rd Tuesday of the month from 8 to 9:30pm ET, via Zoom or phone.

LGBTQ
- Peer support for people who identify as LGBTQ+ and live with mental illness or any mental health challenge. 3rd Thursday of the month, 6 to 7:30pm ET via Zoom or phone.

The affiliate welcomes participants from outside their geographic area, especially in regard to the Spanish language groups, so any local NAMI affiliates who have inquiries around targeted support groups as outlined above, NAMI NYC-Metro encourages you to consider the affiliate’s groups as another resource.

Schenectady

Last fall, NAMI Schenectady began sponsoring activities for peers and community members including providing transportation when needed. Before the winter months, they had invited peers to attend free concerts at the Mabee Farm’s “Howlin’ at the Moon” bluegrass musical series held at Rotterdam Junction.

NAMI Schenectady also held an afternoon of decorative art and socializing at the downtown Schenectady C.R.E.A.T.E. Studio. It was attended by a handful of peers who made canvas tiles depicting winter activities that could be converted into either a decorative magnet or ornament. The affiliate plans on offering another C.R.E.A.T.E. opportunity in early 2022.

NAMI NYC-Metro

NAMI Westchester Hosts Mental Health Presentation for Veterans

As part of its ongoing support of veterans’ issues, NAMI Westchester will be hosting another Mental Health Speakers Forum for veterans on February 7, 2022 at 6:30 PM, at the VFW Yonkers, NY. The forum for veterans, their families and friends is called “Anything’s Possible,” and will feature Sal Gonzales. Sal was injured in 2004 and works with the Wounded Warrior Project, to help as many warriors as possible by sharing his experience and encouraging them to seek help, sharing his message of “Anything’s Possible.”

Westchester

NAMI Westchester Hosts Mental Health Presentation for Veterans

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NAMI Putnam

NAMI Putnam Held Nicole Ettere Garden of Remembrance Dedication Ceremony
On Wednesday, September 15th, NAMI Putnam dedicated the Nicole Ettere Garden of Remembrance, a project that was prompted by Nicole’s parents, Roy and Lucille, to both remember their daughter and others who died by suicide and to bring attention to suicide and suicide prevention.

The dedication featured several speakers, including Pamela Georges-Cohen, president of NAMI Putnam, Matthew Shapiro, NAMI-NYS Associate Director, Public Affairs, State Senators Pete Harckham and Sue Serino, State Assemblymember Kevin Byrne, Putnam County Commissioner of Social Services Mike Piazza, Maria Idoni from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Roy and Lucille Ettere.

It was a beautiful ceremony which honored the life of not only Nicole but also Michael Boccardi, Rich Dudyshyn, Ben Glantz, Richard Thomas Jennings and Thomas Lisk.

The garden in Putnam County was made possible by the County of Putnam, who donated the space and labor, NAMI Putnam and the Ettere family.

NAMI-NYS is partnering with Lucille and Roy to encourage other counties to create gardens of remembrance in their local areas to help raise awareness about suicide and to provide a beautiful and serene place for families and friends to remember and reflect about their loved ones who have died by suicide. If you would like to learn more about the Nicole Ettere Remembrance Garden Project or would like to make a contribution for a garden in your area, please contact NAMI-NYS at info@naminys.org.

Delaware & Otsego

NAMI Delaware and Otsego was created in 2017-18 by the consolidation of 2 small adjoining rural affiliates. Unincorporated, and with no office or staff, our Steering Committee pursues its work plan by email, monthly conference calls, and participation in community forums.

Our Family Support Group meets regularly by phone, and our recent Family To Family series was held in hybrid fashion, some attendees distanced in-person, and some by Zoom.

Advocacy work has included convening Mental Health Justice Project meetings with Delaware County Sheriff and his senior staff to urge CIT training for 911 dispatchers, corrections and road patrol deputies, as well as expanded mental health and peer services for jail inmates. NAMI members participated in and made recommendations to Delaware County’s police reform committee. Additionally, interviews were given to media regarding the still-closed inpatient psychiatric and addictions units in neighboring Ulster County (but serving eastern Delaware County residents), and letters were sent to key policymakers urging re-opening.

Public education included partnering with The Bushel Collective Art gallery and artist/NAMI member Jessica Farrell, for an exhibit of Jessica’s “The Wilderness Diary”, and an online panel discussion “Mental Health: Perspectives on Care, Support & Recovery”. Delaware County NY has one of the highest suicide rates in the state, and nearly 80% of those incarcerated in the county jail have some form of mental illness. Panelists included peer speakers Garrett Smith, Jason Paden and Arianna Ilowit. A similar event is planned for July in Otsego County in collaboration with The Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown.

We also supported a church/RSS collaborative theater project, spoke to a Rotary Club, wrote OpEd pieces on Mental Wellness for the area’s daily paper, and served on county Community Service Advisory Boards.

Finally, we have fielded calls from concerned but often distant family members seeking guidance about area resources for their loved ones— and for themselves in their own communities —as far away as NAMI Hawaii.

Syracuse

Lights on the Lake Festival Supports NAMI Syracuse
In Central New York, the holidays are celebrated with all sorts of events throughout the region, including the Lights on the Lake festival.

The festival opened up with its first three nights being “special nights,” dedicated to celebrating charities and groups around Central New York for their work. This year the fest devoted the first special night to NAMI Syracuse.

Dr. Maggie Bristol, NAMI Syracuse board member, shared, “It’s such an honor for them to have chosen our non-profit to support tonight. We were thrilled to get the acceptance. Being able to partner with something that is so near and dear to Central New Yorkers’ hearts and bring attention to our cause was just an absolute blessing.”

Cattaraugus County

It is with a heavy heart that NAMI-NYS announces the dissolving of the NAMI Cattaraugus County affiliate. If you are interested in helping to start a New NAMI Affiliate in Cattaraugus County please reach out to Tammie Paradis at tammie@naminys.org or (518) 462-2000.
Queens/Nassau

NAMI Sharing Hope at NAMI Queens/Nassau
NAMI recently relaunched the Sharing Hope program, and several NAMI affiliates in New York are participating in the program in order to reach African-American and Spanish-speaking communities to raise awareness and help them receive the help and support they need.

The Sharing Hope program consists of a three-part video series that explores the journey of mental wellness in Black communities through dialogue, storytelling and a guided discussion on the following topics:

**Youth and Mental Wellness:**
“How Do You Heal?”

**Community Leaders and Mental Wellness:**
“The Art of Healing”

**Black Families and Mental Wellness:**
“Smiling On Our Journey”

A key piece to the program is having discussion facilitators who can relate to the participants, enabling a climate of trust and encouraging sharing. NAMI provides training to people who represent the target communities for Sharing Hope and Compartiendo Esperanza to lead the discussions and introduce NAMI.

John Johnson, of NAMI Queens/Nassau, who has been working with the Queensbridge Housing Community for the past year, has recently trained in Sharing Hope. Many of the community members are African American, and they have expressed interest in more access to mental health support in their community. Members of NAMI NYC-Metro are also leading the Sharing Hope program and are working with John at Queensbridge. Both Pam Solomon and Delshon Chestnut have also trained in Sharing Hope in preparation for delivering the program to their affiliate and the Queensbridge community.

NAMI is looking to provide mental health support to the community based on the residents’ identified needs, including NAMI support groups and classes.

Stakeholders in Queensbridge are eager to raise awareness around mental health, and the local NAMI affiliates are working to coordinate several activities that highlight mental health support and mental wellness.

NAMI Queens/Nassau Table at Alanis Morissette concert
On August 28, Ed and Janice Garfinkel, members of the NAMI Q/N board, hosted a volunteer NAMI info table at the Alanis Morissette concert at Northwell Health at Jones Beach. Alanis hosted an online auction event for two VIP ticket packages for each of her performances and NAMI Q/N shared a portion of the proceeds at the end of the tour.

There were several visitors to the NAMI Queens/Nassau table – some who wanted information and some who wanted to say “thank you” and “keep up the good work.” It was a fun evening of spreading mental health awareness and listening to good music.

NAMI Queens/Nassau’s New Initiative:
A space for members to express their thoughts and creativity
NAMI Queens/Nassau is proud to announce the launching of a new page on their website titled “Unites, A Work in Progress.” This is meant to be a safe place within the NAMI Q/N website where peers have the opportunity to express their thoughts, artwork, quotes and writings. In this gallery of sorts, members share what they are working on during the Unites socialization meetings as well as what they as individuals are interested in right now. The purpose of this space is to give members a place to share their creativity without fear of judgment.

There are so many thoughtful and creative members of Unites. For example, Jennifer Keren, a very talented individual, shared her photograph titled Perspective, which illustrates seeing things in a positive light. Many other members such as Jessica Garfinkel and Marc Sills have created pieces that help them express themselves and relieve stress. NAMI Q/N supports and encourages all members of Unites to share their creativity and talent. Send to jgarfinkel@namiqn.org to be posted on the NAMI Q/N Unites page.
Cayuga

NAMI Cayuga Gives Back!
This past holiday season, NAMI Cayuga, with the help of fiber artists from several knitting, crocheting and quilting groups, helped supply the residents of Auburn Community Hospital with blankets and quilts for the winter months. NAMI Cayuga hopes to start more conversations on the needs of residents living with mental health conditions because they are often overlooked. They are still in the process of collecting clean, gently used afghan blankets, hats and mittens and other winter clothing. For more information on how you can get involved, please contact Bart or Terri Wasilenko at Auburn Community Hospital’s NAMI office at 315-255-7443.

NAMI Cayuga has also donated $500 to the Rotary Club of Auburn for their Warm the Children fundraiser. With the help of NAMI Cayuga, the Rotary Club will be able to purchase 800-1200 new winter coats for a distribution to needy children in the county. The collaboration was initiated by Mike Trapani and Karen Mercier and joined by the Citizen newspaper, CAP (Cayuga-Seneca Action Program) and Auburn Rotary Club.

NAMI Rockland

NAMI Rockland values the importance of art for recovery. Thanks to Bud Rebel Fund, a monthly donor to NAMI Rockland who recognizes the benefits of the creative arts for individuals living with mental health challenges, generously earmarked a monetary contribution to purchase Art and Craft supplies. NAMI Rockland partnered with the Rockland Hospital Guild/CLUE to supply the residents of their program, which provides housing to more than 100 people. NAMI Rockland would like to thank Jacquelyn Drechsler and Jocelyn DeCrescenzo, NAMI Rockland Board Members, who volunteered to purchase, wrap, and deliver these supplies.
NAMI-NYS 2021 NAMI-NYS Education Conference Helps Participants Recover Together to Achieve Mental Wellness

The 2021 NAMI-NYS Education Conference “Recovering Together; Achieving Mental Wellness” took place on October 22 and 23. We want to thank everyone who contributed to its huge success. Four hundred people came together to learn about addressing the trauma of the past year and a half as well as other major issues of the day, including the latest on research and treatment of psychiatric disorders.

We especially want to thank our incredible roster of presenters and once again share our appreciation to all our exhibitors and those who participated in the introductory poster session.

Though we couldn’t be together in the same location, the conference was still enhanced by the NAMI-NYS spirit as our members interjected their thoughts, insights and perspectives throughout. We will be making all the session videos available.

Highlights of the conference included the presentation of the 2021 NAMI-NYS Leader of Mental Health Awareness Award to women’s basketball legend Chamique Holdsclaw and the conversation between Chamique and NAMI-NYS’s Cassandra Farrugia. This session also featured remarks from NAMI CEO Daniel H. Gillison, Jr.

Friday morning also saw the inspiring opening session Thank You Recovery for Saving My Life by Dr. Patrick McElwaine, a national leader in suicide prevention, who shared his story of how a traumatic event in his childhood led to years of mental health issues and substance use. Dr. McElwaine explained how embracing recovery not only saved his life but led to it being happy and fulfilling and detailed how embracing recovery can help others who have been impacted by trauma and mental health challenges.

The morning’s other featured session Looking Back and Moving Forward featured a conversation between Cassandra and Dr. Wilfred Farquharson, Co-Chair of the New York State Office of Mental Health’s Multicultural Advisory Committee. Together they explored how the events of the past year have affected all of us and especially impacted children and communities of color.

Workshops sessions examined trauma in multiple settings, education to action initiatives, wellness initiatives and major topics of the day, which included the unveiling of NAMI-NYS’s report on 988 and mental health crisis response.

NAMI-NYS wants to acknowledge all of our 2021 award recipients who were honored during the conference:

- Leader of Mental Health Awareness Award-Chamique Holdsclaw
- Excellence in Research Award-Dr. Anthony Ahmed
- Muriel Shepherd Award-Eileen Geyser, NAMI Sullivan County, NY
- Criminal Justice Award-Deputy Chief of Police Jay Gerace, Colonie Police Department
- Multicultural Award-Dr. Elisa English
- Program Leader Award-Sherry Byrnes, NAMI Buffalo & Erie County
- Max Gabriel Veterans Mental Health Award- Amy Hughes, NAMI Capital Region/NAMI Saratoga
- Young Leader Award-Susanne McHugh NAMI NYC-Metro

Finally, NAMI-NYS wants to express our deep gratitude to all our generous sponsors who made the event possible: The New York State Office of Mental Health, Neurocrine, Otsuka, Janssen, Alkermes, Sunovion, Pharma, Concern for Independent Living, Beacon and AstraZeneca As we begin to take the first steps towards recovery from the traumatic events of 2020, the conference aimed to examine the factors contributing to negative mental health as well as provide the tools to address them.
Join the NAMI-NYS Youth Advisory Council

Youth mental health has never been more important, if you’re looking to make an impact, NAMI-NYS’s Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is the opportunity for you. The council’s purpose is to ensure that NAMI-NYS’s work is youth informed. Our goal is to spread awareness, educate, advocate for, and empower youth and young adults.

YAC is a safe and supportive space for young leaders to meet and work collaboratively in creating and implementing new initiatives, programs and resources for their communities. The council is made up of young adults aged 18–30 from across the state. Please contact Cassandra@namins.org to learn how to join.

Why Get Involved?
- Improve and expand mental health resources for you, your loved ones, peers and community
- Gain experience and receive mentoring from the NAMI-NYS Board & staff
- Explore volunteer, internship & other leadership opportunities
- Direct NAMI-NYS Youth Development initiatives and the Youth Track at the NAMI-NYS Education Conference
- Connect with like-minded Peers
- Share NAMI-NYS Social Media & awareness campaigns to promote our mission and messages of hope
- Because Mental Health Matters

Introducing the 2022 YAC Members:

Elizabeth Whelan (she/her) serves as Chair of the Youth Advisory Council. She is 22 years old, lives in Albany and currently works as a consultant for NYSTEC, helping the NYS Department of Health develop the NYS Public Health Corps. Elizabeth also led UAlbany’s NAMI on Campus her senior year. She shared, “I am excited to continue being involved in NAMI! I am passionate about mental health and want to work towards creating a safer and more accessible space in K-12 schools for students with mental health conditions.”

Emma Oliver is an Occupational Therapist and trained NAMI leader. She has focused her career on working in the mental health field with all age groups in a variety of settings. She shared, “As an OT, I help clients to find meaning in their everyday lives so they can reach whatever life goals they may have. I am passionate about breaking down mental health stigmas by talking openly and educating others.”

Keira Rosner graduated from Tulane University in 2020 with a double major in Digital Media Production and English. She works full-time as a video producer for Know Your Meme and has recently become a MSW Candidate at Fordham University focusing on clinical social work. One of the main reasons that she joined the NAMI-NYS Youth Advisory Council was to meet other young adults who share her passion for mental health advocacy.

Lauren Myers is a 21-year-old student from Cayuga county. She is currently attending the University of Albany, SUNY. At her university, she serves as the president for NAMI on Campus Club, which works to raise awareness and advocate for mental health, while building an open and accepting community on campus. Lauren shared that she joined the Youth Advisory Council in hopes of being able to generate more support for those dealing with mental health issues and work to improve mental health services and policies in New York State and beyond.

Antanaya Wall (she, her, hers) is from the Albany County area. In May of 2020, she graduated from SUNY Albany receiving her Masters. Antanaya currently works as a social worker at a residential facility. She believes in “teaching others how to speak about issues that are concerning mental health on a larger scale and most importantly normalizing having these discussions. And to ‘Be the change you want to seen in the world!’”

Nikita Alexander is 22 years old and currently living in Nassau County, NY. She is a student earning her masters at SUNY OW and will be graduating with a degree in Mental Health Counseling. Nikita shared, “I decided to join NAMI because I want to be more involved in making a change and I want to work towards ending the stigmatization of mental health. I am hoping to meet others that have this similar goal and collaborate with individuals who have a similar mindset. I am looking forward to being a part of the youth advisory council!”
NAMI on Campus

NAMI on Campus clubs are student-led, student-run mental health organizations on college campuses. NAMI on Campus clubs:

- Raise mental health awareness with fairs, walks and candlelit vigils.
- Educate the campus with presentations, guest speakers and student panels.
- Advocate for improved mental health services and policies on campus.
- Support peers with signature NAMI programs and training from NAMI State Organizations and Affiliates.

To find out how to start a NAMI on Campus Club at your college or university, contact NAMI-NYS at info@naminys.org and/or NAMI Affiliate.

NAMI UAlbany Holds Vision Board Making Event

On Tuesday, September 21st, NAMI UAlbany members held a vision board making event. The event encouraged students to de-stress and participate in a mindful activity while setting goals for the future.

2021 TRAINING CLASSES

Family Support Groups

Connections

Family to Family

Peer to Peer

Homefront
NAMI-NYS Stresses How New York Must Address Mental Health in Order to Move Forward

NAMI-NYS is gearing up for the critical 2022 legislative session as decisions made during the next few months will impact the direction of key mental health initiatives for years to come. The outcome for two of NAMI-NYS’s highest priorities, supporting the mental health workforce and implementing and funding a 9-8-8 number and pairing it with a fully functioning mental health crisis response system, truly hang in the balance. NAMI-NYS is also fighting to ensure New York moves forward, not backwards, in terms of the availability of much needed mental health services, supports and therapies.

It is more important than ever that NAMI-NYS members care for those who care for us and support the behavioral health workforce (who provide mental health and substance use services). At a time when New Yorkers are seeking behavioral health services at an all-time high rate, NYS needs to ensure we have the services to meet this increasing demand. Even before the pandemic, mental health providers were struggling due to decades of flat-funding. In the last budget cycle, despite the fact that the American Rescue Plan and the enactment of several revenue raisers led to both a budget surplus and the largest budget in the state’s history, expanded mental health funding was not included in this record spending increase.

We cannot let the importance of the behavioral health workforce continue to be ignored. The appropriate investments must be made to meet the ever-growing demand for mental health services and supports for New York to move forward. NAMI-NYS joins other behavioral health advocates in calling for $500 million in new investments in mental health services and a 5.4% cost of living adjustment (COLA) for the behavioral health workforce in the FY 2022-23 budget. As part of the $500M, NAMI-NYS joins the Bring It Home NYS Campaign in calling for $159.5M to address decades of flat-funding to mental health housing programs.

The time is now to address one of NAMI-NYS’s long-standing priorities, the need to decriminalize mental illness, which begins by providing a mental health response to a mental health crisis. The long-standing failure to provide a mental health response has led to people with mental illness being over represented in the criminal justice system and too dependent on hospital emergency rooms and other services not designed to meet their needs.

New York State has an incredible opportunity with the implementation of the 9-8-8 Mental Health Crisis number to replace 9-1-1. NAMI-NYS is leading the advocacy efforts to implement and fully fund 9-8-8 in order to provide 24 hour statewide coverage, seven days a week, with all the services offered in-state with the ability to provide local resources in a linguistically and culturally competent manner. There also must be funding to accommodate an appropriate workforce to meet the demand for crisis response and mental health services. Additionally, NAMI-NYS also believes funding must be available to educate the public on the difference between 9-8-8 and 9-1-1, and that it is crucial that the New York State Office of Mental Health oversees 9-8-8’s operations.

Access to mental health services and appropriate medications along with person-centered care is more important than ever. As the demand for mental health services continues to increase significantly, New York must ensure that people have access to the medications their doctors determine are most beneficial to their individual recovery. New York must ensure that people discharged from hospitals have immediate access to community services by passing Nicole’s Law. Additionally, New York must increase mental health parity as well as allowing Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHCs) to diagnose and have their services reimbursed by Medicaid.

On December 14th, NAMI-NYS’s Matthew Shapiro and NAMI NYC-Metro’s Kimberly Blair participated in a meeting with Assembly Member Alicia Hyndman to discuss how New York is one of the few states in the country that does not allow pharmacies to administer long-acting anti-psychotic medications that play a critical role in the recovery of many. Kimberly detailed how this issue has impacted her own family and explained the domino effect that can happen due to limited access to appropriate medications. NAMI-NYS has long advocated on behalf of legislation that would address this barrier to person-centered care and grant pharmacies the ability to administer these the same way they do flu-shots and COVID vaccines.

On December 21st, NAMI-NYS participated in an online rally in support of the behavioral health workforce. Former NAMI-NYS President, Lynda Regan, represented the family perspective and told her brother’s story which detailed the many challenges individuals and families face accessing services, the benefits once services are obtained and, most importantly, how these services are impossible to deliver without a workforce.

On December 23rd, following Governor Hochul signing 9-8-8 legislation without a designated funding stream, NAMI-NYS assembled nearly 100 organizations to send a letter to the Governor urging the need to appropriately fund 9-8-8. NAMI-NYS also formed a 9-8-8 Action Network to keep those organizations and individuals concerned about 9-8-8 updated on key developments and advocacy opportunities.

The voice of our readers is needed to explain to our leaders the importance of the three pillars comprising the 2022 NAMI-NYS Action Agenda. NAMI-NYS will be holding our 2022 Legislative Action Weeks from mid-January through mid-March. We are in the process of scheduling meetings with NYS legislators.

On January 19th, NAMI-NYS held an advocacy kick-off event where NAMI-NYS members demonstrated the importance of sharing our stories to shape our future. NAMI-NYS wants to ensure our members feel comfortable sharing their stories with legislators. We have created a wide array of tools to help people
feel comfortable meeting with their legislators. These include:

- NAMI Smarts Advocacy Guide to Effectively Telling Your Story
- Talking Points on NAMI-NYS’s 2022 Action Agenda Priorities
- 2022 Mock Advocacy Meeting-Where NAMI-NYS board and staff members act out a legislative meeting and demonstrate how to connect our stories to NAMI-NYS’s legislative priorities.

We also want to remind our readers that you don’t need to tell your story in a meeting if you are not comfortable doing so. Simply taking the time to be there still sends a powerful message that demonstrates the support for our issues.

NAMI-NYS 2022 Legislative Action Agenda

No Recovery Without Mental Health
NYS Must Address Mental Health in Order to Move Forward

Care for Those Who Care for Us: Support the Mental Health Workforce With a 5.4% COLA and $500 Million Investment for Workforce, Services and Support
At a time when New Yorkers are seeking behavioral health services at an all-time high rate, NYS needs to ensure we have the services to meet this increasing demand. Even before the pandemic mental health providers were struggling due to decades of flat-funding. The appropriate investments must be made to meet the ever-growing demand for mental health services and support for New York to recover and move forward.

NAMI-NYS applauds Governor Hochul for including funding for a 5.4% COLA for the behavioral health work force and $104 million for residential (mental health housing) programs in her Executive Budget and urges the New York State Legislature to keep these much needed investments in the final budget.

Behavioral Health advocates also called for a $500 million investment in workforce, service and support to address the years of inadequate funding. This was not included in its entirety in the proposed Executive budget and NAMI-NYS is hopeful that the Legislature will add funding to address any unmet need for the behavioral health sector.

Create Mental Health Responses to a Mental Health Crisis Fund 9-8-8 and Improve the Criminal Justice – Mental Illness Interface
The time is now to address one of the greatest social justice issues of our time and ensure that a mental health crisis is met with a mental health response. The failure to provide a mental health response has led to people with mental illness being over represented in the criminal justice system and too dependent on hospital emergency rooms and other services not designed to meet their needs. NYS has an incredible opportunity with the implementation of the 9-8-8 Mental Health Crisis number to create a true mental health response. To do so, the state must fund 9-8-8 and pair it with mobile mental health response teams, crisis stabilization services and advance critical criminal justice reform legislation.

Support Gov Hochul’s 988 Funding Proposal - 988 must be funded in order to provide 24/7/365 statewide coverage offered by in-state providers with the ability to provide local resources in a linguistically and culturally competent manner. NAMI-NYS supports Gov Hochul’s proposal of $35m in FY 2022-23 and $60m in FY 2023-24 for 988.

Support A.4697/S.4814 Daniel’s Law - Ensures that a mental health crisis is met with a mental health response by having mobile mental health response units handle mental health calls in our communities.

Expand Crisis Stabilization Services which provide appropriate Mental Health care to those experiencing a Mental Health crisis.

Support A.6399-A/S.1553-B The Clean Slate Act - Which automatically expunges certain convictions after 3 years for a misdemeanor and 7 years for a felony if certain criteria are met.

Support A.6603/S.2881 - Expands the use of specialty courts, such as mental health, addiction and veteran courts.

Ensure Access to Appropriate Services and Medication
Access to mental health services and appropriate medications is more important than ever. As the demand for mental health services is at an all-time high, we must meet this demand and ensure that people have access to the medications, treatments and supports their doctors determine are most beneficial to them and have these recovery tools covered.

- Ensure prescriber prevails language for Medicaid services in the final budget.
- Support A.3276 The Mental Health Access Bill-Which prohibits insurance providers from using “fail-first” and “step-up” procedures for psychiatric medication. This bill passed the Senate in 2021 and now we need the Assembly to act.
- Support (NEED NEW) Nicole’s Law: Which addresses suicide by reforming hospital practices and enhancing discharge.
- Support A5238/S3995 Mental Health Parity Amendment-Amending the NYS Constitution to ensure mental health parity.
- Support A.3840/S.4870 Allowing pharmacies to administer injectable medications.
- Support A.5751/S.3221 Which would grant LMHCs and LCs the ability to diagnose.
- Support S7865, S7753, S7752 (Assembly bill# TBA)-Maternal Mental Health Package which would address disparities in care, increase pre- and postnatal care and improve postpartum depression screening tools.
NAMI-NYS has long worked to decriminalize mental illness and address the traumatic and oftentimes tragic outcomes that occur when law enforcement has to intervene with people living with a mental illness when they are experiencing a crisis situation. For more than a year now, NAMI-NYS has led the advocacy efforts to appropriately implement and fund New York’s 9-8-8 crisis line system to replace 9-1-1 as the number to use when experiencing a crisis stemming from a mental health or substance use issue.

In December, when Governor Hochul signed 9-8-8 legislation without a designated funding stream, NAMI-NYS quickly sprung to action and in a day and a half assembled a 100 advocacy organizations that jointly sent a letter to the Governor. The letter stipulated that in order for 9-8-8 to be more than a number and serve as a true gateway to recovery, then is must be appropriately funded to offer 24 hour statewide services offered by instate providers who have the ability to provide local resources in a linguistically and culturally competent manner and that the Office of Mental Health needs to oversee 9-8-8 operations. NAMI-NYS also launched a campaign allowing our members to send pre-written letters to Governor Hochul and key leaders. In less than four weeks, NAMI-NYS advocates generated 4374 letters.

These efforts proved to be successful when Governor Hochul announced $35 million in the fiscal year (FY) 2022-23 state budget which will expand to $60 million in FY 23-24 budget. NAMI-NYS praised the Governor for this historic investment.

This success came after a year of focused advocacy and participation in the New York State Office of Mental Health’s 988 Implementation Workgroup, where NAMI-NYS serves on three of the workgroup’s committees.

In November NAMI-NYS released our sweeping report; Meeting a Mental Health Crisis with a Mental Health Response-A Report by NAMI-NYS Detailing How to Maximize the Opportunities Associated with New York State Implementing a 988 Mental Health Crisis Number.

As the report details, 9-8-8 is more than a number, it is a gateway to recovery and a much needed diversion from police interventions and the criminal justice system. Since 2015, nearly one in four fatal police shootings nationally have been of people with mental illness and of those, one in three were people of color. Unfortunately, New York has not been immune to this heartbreaking and avoidable trend, as the death of Daniel Prude in 2020 following a call to 9-1-1 and an interaction with the Rochester police is just the latest in a line of New Yorkers who lived with mental illness and lost their lives as a result of ineffective crisis response.

These tragedies are even more frequent when it comes to police response to people of color in a mental health crisis. In December of 2021, Eudes Pierre, a young man with mental illness was shot and killed by New York City police officers in Brooklyn. “My son was a good kid,” Marguerite Jolivert, Mr. Pierre’s mother, said at a news conference. “He was sick. He had mental disease. He didn’t deserve to be killed like an animal.”

Other prominent recent examples of New Yorkers from communities of color living with a mental illness who died by police responding to their crisis include Deborah Danner and Saheed Vassell. The 2020 pepper spraying incident of a nine-year old girl experiencing a mental health crisis also speaks for the need for the reforms NAMI-NYS is recommending in the report.

It is time for New York to commit to ensuring a mental health crisis is met with a mental health response. It is not fair to place the burden on law enforcement to de-escalate mental health crisis situations, nor is it fair to treat someone with a mental health condition in crisis as a criminal. The landmark report provides a roadmap on how to build upon the implementation of a 9-8-8 mental health crisis number in July 2022, in order to create a fully functioning mental health crisis response system.

“New York State has a tremendous opportunity to better address a mental health crisis with the implementation of the 9-8-8 Mental Health Crisis number that does not simply replace 9-1-1 but improves on it,” says NAMI-NYS executive director, Wendy Burch adding, “However, we only have one chance to implement a mental health crisis response system correctly, which is why we cannot squander this opportunity and only address one piece of the solution. NAMI-NYS’s report provides all the steps necessary to properly address a mental health crisis and thus creating a more mentally healthy New York State.”

“The New York State Office of Mental Health has made great strides in this area and has demonstrated a commitment towards appropriately responding to mental health crisis situations,” says NAMI NYS president, Mary Bartlett, adding, “but the stories of our members contained in the report demonstrate that New York’s families are still being traumatized when negative interactions with law enforcement worsen a crisis. The report provides NAMI-NYS recommendations on how to build on existing New York State initiatives and create a fully functioning statewide mental health crisis response system, which puts people on the road to recovery and frees up law enforcement to do the job they signed up to do.”

The report details how, along with a 9-8-8 number to call during a crisis, having specially trained mental health professionals respond to these calls and having recovery oriented crisis stabilization services to take someone who needs to be removed from the crisis location are both integral elements needed for an appropriate mental health crisis response. The report also details the funding available to establish and sustain the three crucial elements of a mental health crisis response.

Along with detailing the need to establish the three crucial elements of appropriate mental health crisis response, the report also highlights the necessity of including peer specialists within those elements and emphasizes the importance of seeking family insight throughout the process of mental health crisis response. The report examines other important issues impacting mental health crisis response, including the need for specialty courts that divert people from incarceration and towards recovery services, the need to continue funding Crisis
NAMI SMARTS

NAMI SMARTS is a hands-on advocacy training program that helps people living with mental illness, friends and family transform their passion and lived experience into skillful grassroots advocacy.

On January 13th, NAMI Capital Region hosted a virtual NAMI SMARTS training to provide step-by-step tools and the hands-on practice for members to feel clear, confident and ready to make a difference this legislative session. NAMI Capital Region would like to thank NAMI SMARTS teachers Matthew Shapiro and Cassandra Farrugia and all the members who participated and bravely shared their stories. Please contact your local affiliate to find a training near you.

Intervention Team (CIT) training for when police need to be involved in a mental health situation and the need for increased community services, including mental health housing programs, that need to be in place when more enhanced care is required in order to sustain the recovery of people with more serious mental health issues.

The report also features harrowing stories from NAMI-NYS members from all corners of the state who detail how negative criminal justice interactions have impacted them and their families.

NAMI-NYS Director of Public Affairs, Matthew Shapiro, presented at the national Reimagine Crisis conference to discuss NAMI-NYS's 9-8-8 advocacy efforts and how we utilized the voices of our members in our report to demonstrate the importance of meeting a mental health crisis with a mental health response. Matthew has also discussed the importance of 9-8-8 in several media outlets including on the Capitol Pressroom.

NAMI-NYS SPREADS AWARENESS

NAMI-NYS Supports Wellness

NAMI-NYS Hosted Therapeutic Knitting Group
This fall, Cassandra Farrugia, NAMI-NYS Associate Director of Communications & Outreach, hosted another successful season of Therapeutic Knitting. Cassandra started the group in the fall of 2020 to share the crafts’ wonderful benefits such as calming anxiety and relieving stress. The group included knitters of all levels from across the state who were grateful to find a virtual way to enjoy the social nature of knitting as we continued to social distance.

NAMI-NYS Hosted Winter Blues Discussion
On December 7th, NAMI-NYS hosted a discussion on the “Winter Blues” with panelists Dr. Christine Crawford, NAMI Associate Medical Director, and Lisa O’Donnell Wolfe, Mind & Body Transformation coach. Dr. Crawford and Lisa shared the impact of the “Winter Blues,” Seasonal Affective Disorder, and the ‘Holiday Blues’ and helpful tips on how to combat their effects. This discussion can be viewed on the NAMI-NYS YouTube channel.
NAMI-NYS Holds Annual Awareness Event Off the Mask

On Friday, September 10th, NAMI-NYS celebrated the Off the Mask Fashion and Art show, an event designed to raise mental health awareness and funding for NAMI-NYS programs, advocacy and outreach.

The event, emceed by local celebrities Benita Zahn and Taylor Rao, kicked off with welcoming remarks from former NAMI-NYS Board President, Lynda Regan, and Executive Director, Wendy Burch, followed by guest speaker Dawn Gallagher, a former supermodel who is now a beauty and wellness maven. Dawn spoke about the importance of mental wellness and self-care, as well as the importance of the work that NAMI volunteers do throughout New York.

Next, our model ambassadors, who each have a connection to mental health challenges whether as a peer or family member, took to the runway inspiring our guests with their stories and displaying the clothes created by our outstanding local designers.

During the intermission, NAMI-NYS and Off the Mask Co-Chairs Mary Bartlett and Ann Canastra had the great honor of presenting four awards which celebrated two organizations and two individuals for their outstanding work. The Hannaford Foundation received the Corporation of the Year Award, and Glennpeter Jewelers Diamond Centre the Small Business Award. NAMI-NYS also honored a couple of our own member volunteers, with Mary Beth Honsinger receiving the Peer of the Year Award and Minerva Ortiz the Volunteer of the Year Award.

The event also featured a successful silent auction with some really unique and varied items, as well as an art show component highlighting some incredibly talented artists.

NAMI-NYS is so grateful to the model ambassadors who worked so hard to raise funds to support NAMI, and we applaud their courage in being willing to “off” their symbolic mask and walk the runway in support of NAMI-NYS and the local NAMI affiliates. Many, many thanks to our generous sponsors who showed such strong support for the NAMI mission, including the in-kind sponsors who contributed to hair and makeup, clothing design, flowers and materials for VIP and model bags. We also appreciate Benita, Taylor and Dawn’s willingness to lend their talents to the event, and the many volunteers and committee members who did so much work behind the scenes to make Off the Mask so successful. We can’t wait to do it again!

For 2022, NAMI-NYS is looking to hold the annual Off the Mask in conjunction with the annual Education Conference. The goal is to facilitate the participation of more local NAMI affiliates. Last year’s event raised funds specifically for the affiliates who agreed to sponsor their own model ambassadors, which meant that a large percentage of the funds raised by their model ambassadors went directly to the local affiliate. It also provided the opportunity for the affiliate to highlight the accomplishments of one of their own members or volunteers.

NAMI-NYS wants to thank everyone who participated or contributed to Off the Mask, whose proceeds support NAMI-NYS’s mission to help people with mental health conditions and their families build better lives through advocacy, awareness, support and education.
Off the Mask featured some really exceptional models, many of whom used the platform to highlight various aspects of mental health. In some cases, the models’ personal experiences and triumphs led to stories in the media. 2021 model ambassadors included:

- Danielle Kownack
- Maddie Canastra
- Christine Baxter
- John Johnson
- Christine Baxter
- Eileen Geyson
- Rachel Lauria
- John Johnson
- Frank Boswell, Jr
- Matthew Shapiro
- Luke Forbes
- Heather Thompson
- Kristin Garzone
- Greg Hitchcock
- Lisa O’Donnell Wolfe
- Matthew Shapiro
- Vinnie Lauria
- Lori Schneider
- Katie Regan
- Beni Walle
- Lacey Roy
- Beni Walle
Suicide Prevention Month

September was Suicide Prevention Awareness Month – a time to raise awareness on this stigmatized, and often taboo, topic. In addition to shifting public perception, we used September to spread hope and vital information to people affected by suicide. Our goal was to ensure that individuals, friends and families have access to the resources they need to discuss suicide prevention and to seek help.

Throughout the month of September, NAMI-NYS highlighted “Together for Mental Health,” which encourages people to bring their voices together to advocate for better mental health care, including a crisis response system. NAMI-NYS wants any person experiencing suicidal thoughts or behaviors to have a number to call, a system to turn to, that would connect them to the treatment and support they need.

Mental Health Awareness Week

As many of us know, each year, millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental health condition. However, mental illness affects everyone directly or indirectly through family, friends or coworkers. That is why during the first week of October, NAMI-NYS joined in raising awareness of mental illness, fighting discrimination and providing support through Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW).

To engage our communities, we held a week of virtual events which can be viewed on our YouTube channel, learn more below:

Journaling for Mental Health

On October 4th, Cassandra Farrugia, NAMI-NYS Associate Director of Communications and Outreach, held a workshop on creating your own self-care journal. Studies have demonstrated journaling can reduce stress, increase self-reflection, and create a better sense of wellbeing.

Baking for Mental Health

On October 5th, Kate Tortora, former Community Education and Outreach Manager, and Cassandra Farrugia, Associate Director of Communications and Outreach, hosted a brownie baking segment to promote the many wonderful benefits of baking. Baking is a mindful and meditative activity that stimulates the senses and promotes creativity. Visit our YouTube channel to learn how to bake homemade brownies.

Family & Friends Together for Mental Health

On October 6th, NAMI-NYS hosted a vital discussion on how family and friends can help prevent suicide with a panel of experts from the field and with lived experience. The discussion can be viewed on the NAMI-NYS YouTube channel.

About our panel members:

Garra Lloyd-Lester is the Suicide Prevention Center of New York Coordinator. As Coordinator, Garra works with State and County partners, local governmental units, local coalitions, and other systems to build capacity to help reduce suicide across the lifespan. This work is accomplished through systems level planning, coalition building, program development and training among other activities. He has facilitated and/or continues to facilitate a workgroup as part of the Governors Challenge to prevent suicide among Service Members, Veterans and their Families (SMVF), a statewide steering committee to address suicide prevention among first responder disciplines and facilitated the statewide taskforce to develop recommendations on addressing suicide prevention among rural communities in NYS.

Cara Glowacki is a Peer living with mental health conditions and a NAMI Capital Region, NY Board Member. Cara is a kidney cancer and suicide survivor. She bravely shares her journey with others to spread the message you are not alone and recovery is possible.

In addition to all her work as a board member of NAMI Capital Region, she identifies as an artist and writer.

Dan Egan currently serves as Board Chair for the Capital Region Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and sits on AFSP’s National Loss and Healing Council. He got involved with AFSP because he lost his father to suicide 31 years ago. Dan describes his path to healing was a very solitary one and after dealing with his own mental health struggles over a decade ago, he reached a point where he felt his experiences could help others travel an easier road. Since joining AFSP, Dan works to reduce the stigma and let others know that help is out there and that they are not alone.

Yoga for Mental Health with Mandee Guzzo

On October 7th, NAMI-NYS hosted a yoga session with instructor Mandee Guzzo. Yoga is a wonderful wellness practice that can affect mood by elevating levels of a brain chemical called gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), which is associated with better mood and decreased anxiety.

Mandee led participants in Vinyasa Yoga which is designed to cultivate heat in the body with creative sequences involving sun salutations, standing and seated postures, back bending, arm balancing, and a strong focus on the power of breath awareness. The session was a great success and helped participants mindfully reconnect with their bodies.
NAMI NYS Donations August 2021- January 2022

NAMI-NYS is so grateful for all the generous contributions from our donors. Your support helps to fund training and programs, outreach and advocacy, events like the annual Education Conference, support for the Helpline, special events like the Wellness Wednesday series and advocacy efforts to improve the lives of those affected by mental health conditions.

NAMI-NYS recognizes that the local NAMI affiliates are on the ground providing peer support to their communities on a daily basis, and we continue to increase our efforts to support their work, both through direct funding, as well as creating resources to assist them based on the affiliates’ feedback. This includes assistance with handling helpline inquiries, maintaining effective NAMI programs, guidance around advocacy and outreach and facilitating communication between affiliates on best practices.

Thank you to all of our donors-you are not only supporting NAMI-NYS but also the local affiliates around New York who do such outstanding work every day!

Over $1000
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$500- $1000
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Up to $100
May – Mental Health Awareness Month

July – BIPOC Mental Health Awareness Month

September – Suicide Prevention Month

November 11-12 – NAMI-NYS Education Conference

November 12 – Off the Mask