
FROM YOUR PRESIDENT:

At the time you receive this Newsletter, NAMI-FL will have convened its first Annual Meeting as a fully Incorporated Tax-Exempt Not-for-Profit Group – a very exciting time for us. This designation will now allow us to apply for grants and, hopefully, receive more regular donations and sponsorships to help finance the very important work we do – with only dedicated volunteers. I think it will also seem to make us more “legitimate” as an agency in our community! One thing we must never forget, however – we are still a “grass roots” affiliate that will always put helping people first – families, friends, and individuals struggling from the impact of Mental Illness. We do now need to meet certain organizational standards, according to our By-Laws, but I do not intend to concentrate too much time and energy “at the top”. Our 2007 Board and Committees (as are needed) will do very important work to see that we continue our wonderful history of Support, Education, and Advocacy. We will continue to collaborate with other like-minded groups in town, as is appropriate, and reach out to those people who still need to meet us but, as of yet, have not.

We need all of your support – both financial and emotional to do such work. If you are a “friend” and have not joined, please think about this. Your financial contribution means a lot but also it is

important to have as many members as possible when we are speaking our cause to the community – and especially applying for grants. Besides, if you join as members, you will receive two excellent newsletters – one from NAMI-NYS and one from NAMI National...everything you have ever wanted to know about mental illness. Membership applications are available at our website: <http://www.namifingerlakes.org/> if you click on the Help Others link.

We need your support in any way you can give it!

We look forward in 2007 to continuing our wonderful programs and to perhaps make a few more connections. We hope to get more involved with Cornell Minds Matter – a student group on the Cornell Campus that educates, supports, and advocates around issues of mental illness as we do, and will hopefully co-sponsor with them an educational event in Sept. We want to expand our new connections with the Unit at Cayuga Medical Center – offering Welcome Folders to family members and Support Group facilitation, as needed. We will do as much as we are able...with help from all of you.

I wish us all a VERY GOOD YEAR!!!!

Carol Booth, President, NAMI-FL

FALL FUNDRAISER

Quite fortunately, our NAMI-FL was the recipient of a very large donation from the Cornell University Lamda CHI Fraternity on campus in late September, 2006. Under the leadership of Chris Cannon and Grayson Fahrner, the Fraternity sold a large number of sweaters to the Cornell Community and raised \$7,000 – that was significantly higher than any other previous fundraisers. We thank the Lamda Chi Fraternity for all its hard work and its continuing dedication to our Support, Education, and Advocacy for those struggling with Mental Illnesses and their Families -- in the Ithaca Community.

COMPOS MENTIS: Working Toward Wellness in Ithaca, NY

www.composmentisithaca.org

How many of us have known the distraught, anxious and uncertain times around our family member's mental illness? Certainly, all of us.

I have a very personal reason for wanting to create Compos Mentis: Working toward Wellness here in Ithaca. I'm at a point in life when I want to turn the sadness I carry about my son's mental illness into something sweeter that might make a difference. The concept of Compos Mentis (Latin for "in control of your mind") stems from the experiences of people living with mental illnesses and their relatives, friends, doctors and therapists.

At the time of my son's first hospitalization, an old friend said to me; "It's as if a storm has raged in his brain. It'll take time to recover from that storm." Compos Mentis addresses the fact that our

health care system does not acknowledge how much time most people need to adjust to a diagnosis. We hope that by setting aside time to deal with the issue head-on, we can help prevent future crises, prolonged hospital stays and other disruptions of everyday life.

We've been talking about Compos Mentis for about 3 years: A place to come out of that storm of episodic illness; to pick up broken pieces; set simple goals and work toward them with other people all trying to regain their ballast and purpose; a place to have fun and enjoy life again with the help of skilled caring mentors and family members.

Last March, the Cayuga Nature Center gave us the opportunity to make the dream happen on their unused 40 acre farm on Garrett Road (off Rt. 89 before the Nature Center coming from Ithaca). We are leasing the farm to create a place where individuals with a mental illness can learn to live with their illness, work and enjoy the outdoors.

This year, we will run the program as a pilot for 12 "apprentices," adults over 18, from May – October. During the growing season, participants, staff, volunteers and mentors will form a community that is not treatment program but an educational, healing environment that provides outdoor regenerative work, organic farming, agro-forestry, trail maintenance, as well as skill building along individual interests, discussions about health and playful recreation. We hope that participants will regain strength and equilibrium after a time at Compos Mentis while retaining ties to their families, friends and home community.

Compos Mentis will operate Mondays to Fridays from morning to late afternoon with weekend activities. Participants commute from their own homes. We expect participants to see their psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse on their own, to make decisions about the use of medicines, and to honor those choices.

Compos Mentis is a not-for-profit corporation with IRS 501©3 status that relies on the generosity of the community at large. Participation fees are charged according to the ability to pay.

If you would like to help develop the program by becoming a volunteer, or wish information on being a participant, please contact Carole Stone, director at 607-277-7114, or Susan Larkin at SCL18@Cornell.edu. Volunteer training will be provided for people who are going to work with participants at the farm. There is also work for other volunteers who don't have time for training or to work at the farm.

Lost Cases Recovered Lives: Suitcases from a State Hospital Attic

Several years ago several of us (NAMI-FL members) drove to Albany to view and "experience" a most inspirational exhibit at the State Museum. This same exhibit is traveling to the Everson Museum in Syracuse and will be showing from March to May, 2007. Go to the Everson Museum website for specific dates – NAMI-Promise will also be planning some special events to accompany this exhibit.

In 1995, during the closure of Willard Psychiatric Center, several hundred suitcases filled with personal belongings of former patients were discovered in the

attic. The suitcases bear witness to the rich, complex lives these people led before being committed to Willard – aspirations, accomplishments, community connections, as well as isolation.

This exhibit was created to honor the memories of these people and others like them who were removed from their communities and institutionalized from the mid-19th century.

We highly encourage any of you to drive up to Syracuse to view this exhibit – it will be well worth your time. As NAMI-FL learns more about the details – we will have that information at our office number.

EDUCATION

Family-to-Family Course

NAMI Finger Lakes is now offering its sixth free "Family-to-Family Courses" beginning on February 28, 2007. Offered on Wednesdays, 6:30-9:00 PM at the Henry St. John Building on the corner of W. Clinton & S. Geneva, Ithaca, NY, twelve weekly classes to help you learn about symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment, including medications; how to maintain your own emotional balance; and how to help, understand, and communicate with a mentally ill person.

This free course, which has been taken by over 80,000 people in the US and Canada, is taught by volunteers who understand from personal experience how difficult and painful your situation can be. Small class size assures that everyone can share their thoughts and emotions about their situations. All information is kept confidential.

It is too late to register for the current class, but if you are interested in taking the class in the future, call Jean Walters at (607) 273-2462 or Carol Booth at (607) 272-6573 for further information.

In Our Own Voice – A Community Dialogue

On September 19, 2006, NAMI-FL sponsored a wonderful National NAMI Program, entitled IN OUR OWN VOICE. Rachel Greco, herself struggling with Bipolar Disorder for many years, came from Albany to present this event. She talked about the daily challenges she faces but the incredible opportunities she has been given and the tremendous support she has always received from her family. Her family connected early on in Rachel's illness with NAMI to get the support and education they needed. About 75 individuals attended this event – family members, consumers, service providers, and interested community members. Attendees stayed to pick up information and to chat with each other and us.

Breaking the Silence

I have been busy again visiting local schools in Tompkins County, consulting with teachers and presenting to students from 5th grade through high school. I am again encouraged by those I connect with about their level of interest in the facts about mental illnesses and the impact on both individuals and family members. I presented 14 classes out at Dryden Elementary – 5th grades in October. This has been the 3rd or 4th year they have asked me to come – they say to the students that “*Mrs. Booth has very interesting and important things to tell us about people*” !

I also presented lessons to 4 Trumansburg High School Health classes, 4 Dewitt Middle School Health classes, and 4 Newfield Middle and High School classes. I just finished visiting 3 Northeast 5th grade classes – each for 2 presentations.

I have consulted with the Lansing High School Health teacher and have a plan with her to teach in her 3 Health classes in late February. I also have several repeat visits planned for Spring, along with several other Elementary Schools that I have not yet scheduled.

I continue to be “energized” by these Lessons and my interactions with both teachers and students. I continue to spend time on expanding my reach – would love to see every 5th, 7th, and 10th grader in Tompkins County spending time learning about Mental Illness as part of their Health Curriculum.

Teaching Tolerance – a wonderful magazine read by many teachers in our districts – might interview me about my work teaching “Breaking the Silence” in Tompkins County. I don't know if this will really happen – but I hope it does – this would give our cause a great boost!

Thanks to SETRC and Youth Development at BOCES for all their support!

Carol Booth, President, NAMI-FL

Undergraduate Lectures

On April 26, 2006 NAMI Co-President Bruce McKee gave a talk on "Mental Illness as a Family Stressor" to one hundred undergraduate students of Cornell's "Families and the Life Course"

(Human Development/ Sociology 250). This presentation discussed how major mental illness affects families, and how families are forcing change onto the US mental health care system.

Course instructor Dr. Kristi Lekies invited the talk because the course textbook did not contain any information on how mental illness impacts families. Dr. Lekies was pleased with the presentation, and sent NAMI-Finger Lakes the following note:

"I wanted to thank you again for coming to speak to my class this spring. The semester is now over, and a number of students commented on their evaluations how interesting your presentation was. I learned a great deal and have a much greater appreciation for the challenges faced by families dealing with mental illness. You were realistic, but also hopeful."

Minds Matter

NAMI-Finger Lakes members participated in two panels organized by Cornell University's "Minds Matter", Cornell University's only student run mental health awareness and advocacy organization.

As a result of such contacts, NAMI-Finger Lakes will be helping out "Minds Matter" with their planned 2007 lecture by Kay Redfield Jamison, a noted author and psychiatrist who suffers from bipolar disorder.

Three public education programs

NAMI Finger Lakes organized a major community education program in the Fall of 2006. Running from September 18 through October 19th, the program's theme was "Empathy - What Is It Like To Live

with a Mental Illness"? Our goal was to educate ourselves and the Ithaca public about how mental illness impacts the lives of our loved ones and the challenges they face in living a normal life; and to recognize their courage in persevering in the face of personal pain and societal stigma.

The education program began on with an information table at the Tompkins County Public Library from September 18 through 29, organized by Joanne Dennison. The information was intended to reduce stigma by showing that major mental illness is a common affliction (like cancer & diabetes), and that with proper treatment and support many individuals can lead productive and fulfilling lives. Joanne reported that she had to regularly restock brochures on the information table, indicating that many families took advantage of the free information.

The second fall event was a talk by Ms. Rachel Greco, "In Our Own Voice: Living With Mental Illness". Ms. Greco is the Program/Outreach Manager for NAMI New York State, and she talked about how Bipolar Disorder has impacted her life, and the challenges she faces in managing her illness while maintaining a successful personal and professional life.

Ms. Greco gave her talk as part of NAMI's "In Our Own Voice: Living With Mental Illness" program, an education program that encourages mental health consumers to become actively involved in education about severe mental illnesses. Rachel's talk was held September 19th at the Borg Warner Room East, Tompkins County Public Library in Ithaca, NY. Event organizer Carol Booth reported that 75 people attended the talk, and almost everyone stayed to ask Rachel questions

after she concluded her formal presentation. Many of these same people also took home free information from the NAMI-Finger Lakes information table set up in the lecture hall.

In the final educational event in 2006, NAMI-Finger Lakes sponsored showings during October 17-19 of the Schizophrenia Symptom Simulator to the general public, families, and mental health and social workers.

The Simulator is a virtual reality machine, developed in close consultation with individuals suffering from schizophrenia, that uses a computer, video goggles and headphones to simulate the frightening delusions and auditory and visual hallucinations associated with untreated schizophrenia.

Janssen originally developed the simulator to help doctors appreciate the difficult "inner world" of their schizophrenic patients. By showing this to Ithaca residents and officials, we hoped that this will build understanding for the challenges facing those diagnosed with schizophrenia - and admiration for their bravery.

We feel that we succeeded in these goals - ninety-three people - including many from local agencies working with mentally ill clients - came to view the simulator. Many participants commented that they better appreciated the challenges facing their relatives and clients suffering from schizophrenia.

Mental Illness in the Workplace

Deb Grantham has been working with the Employment & Disability Institute of the Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations, the Employee Assistance

Program, and NAMI-Finger Lakes to develop education for Cornell Cooperative Extension on mental illness and its impact in/on the workplace. On February 2, 2007, the group delivered a two-hour workshop to Cornell Cooperative Extension Administration on the Cornell Campus. The workshop covered the history of mental illness treatment; mental illness as a brain disorder and information on NAMI (Bruce McKee as speaker); the legal and human resources considerations, including the American Disability Act; and the human experience (two NAMI-Finger Lakes members spoke about their personal experiences having mental illness and caregiving for a relative).

This event was for Cornell Cooperative Extension Administration – about 40 administrative assistants, human resources, finance, state specialists, assistant and associate directors, and the director of Extension attended. It will be revised and repeated for Executive Directors of Cornell Cooperative Extension Associations across the state and ultimately for staff of those Associations (56 associations across the state with a total of about 1700 employees).

LEGISLATION

Timothy's Law

In late December, 2006, Governor Pataki did finally sign Timothy's Law. Both sides of the New York Legislature had signed it earlier and we were all holding our breath that the Governor would sign and not veto. He did!! Timothy's Law is New York State's form of Insurance Parity – putting many types of mental illnesses on equal footing with other physical illnesses – impacting actual services provided, co-pays, prescriptions, inpatient and

outpatient lengths of stay. As family and friends of individuals who struggle with major mental illnesses, we all know how important this equality is.

This Law is named for Timothy O'Clair (www.timothyslaw.org) – an adolescent living in Schenectady who also had suffered from several severe forms of emotional illnesses for many years. Although, his father worked for the NYS Thruway Authority and did have NYS insurance – this insurance was not adequate to treat his son successfully and enable him to work towards recovery. After many years of seeking the best medical help – Timothy took his life. His parents have been advocating for **Timothy's Law** ever since.

We should be proud that the citizens of New York State who struggle with severe mental illnesses will now face less Stigma and Discrimination when they seek medical treatment for their BIOLOGICAL ILLNESSES.

PLANS FOR MENTAL HEALTH MONTH: NAMI RALLY

Location: Cass Park
Date: May 19
Time: 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Goal: To bring together community groups concerned about mental health and mental illness in an awareness-raising event.

Theme or Rallying Cry: One in 4

Several members of NAMI-Finger Lakes are planning a May rally, perhaps in collaboration with local providers of mental health services. The theme of "One in Four" refers to families affected. Plans are just underway at this point, but with help from other members we may be able to plan an event that could include a speaker, a theater group, or maybe even some bands. It would be a wonderful way to work with other local organizations to help fight the stigma we have been working against. Please call or write Ann Carter 607- 849-6506 (phone number) or kipcart@aol.com (email) if you might be able to help.