

A Note from Our President...

What a very good year so far – NAMI-FL is alive and well in Ithaca and Tompkins County!! We started 2008 with our Annual Meeting – a highlight of which was a warm “thank you” to Jean Walters for her many years of service to families struggling with mental illnesses. We elected four new Board Members – Sherry Scott, Linda Duttweiler, Deb Grantham, and Rebecca Schwed – to join five other continuing members. Our 7th Family-to-Family Class began on Valentine’s Day and eventually graduated 16 students – all of whom were very grateful for its existence. The class will be taught again in Spring, 2009. This spring, the Board Meetings set in motion two Program Committees – one to plan for our 2nd Annual Rally on May 17 and another to plan for our Wellness Event during Mental Illness Awareness Month in October. About twenty-five individuals came forward to volunteer, in one way or another, to help make our Rally a big success. Thank you to all who helped.

The NAMI-FL Board is working to send out an Appeal to both local Businesses and Members/Friends by the end of August. We are trying to find diverse ways to fund the very important programs and services

that our entirely volunteer staff spends so many hours planning and doing – and we do need your help and generosity. Membership dues are very important and we strongly encourage everyone to keep up with their dues – and we also encourage those of you out there who have not joined to do so. Planning for a second garage sale is underway. And we are always very appreciative of the very large donation each year from the Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity at Cornell University.

Our usual Support Services and Advocacy Services are continuing, as is our ever-growing Library – drop in at our Office and browse through our wonderful selection of brochures and books. We are collaborating with many other like-minded agencies in town – quite a few agencies brought information to our Rally or attended in person. People are calling us from the human service community to help with various projects related to families and mental illness. This is great progress. The difficulties of Mental Illnesses are too big to bear alone – we need to all work together in our Community.

Join us for our traditional August Picnic (August 19) at the Small Pavilion, Stewart Park, a great chance for all our NAMI-FL members, friends, and family to socialize

next to Cayuga Lake and catch up with each other.

On Wednesday, October 22, we will be sponsoring a most important event here in Ithaca. Our Wellness Event will have John Allen, Recipient Affairs Director for OMH, as our Keynote Speaker, a local panel of doctors, specialists in nutrition, diabetes, and cardio-vascular diseases, and a personal story of Recovery -- emphasizing the importance of exercise. A speaker from our own Tompkins County Mental Health Services will speak about the need for a Metabolic Clinic, embedded within the Outpatient Clinic itself, to help monitor individuals most vulnerable to these illnesses.

We hope to continue making Family Packets for our Hospital Unit and will also try to send packets out regarding these Wellness Issues to all Internists, Family Doctors, and Pediatricians in Tompkins County. We will need more volunteers to move forward on these projects. We also plan to have a new computer soon with updated software and will probably need some volunteers with office experience to help Jean out. Please call us if you are interested in helping out with any of these events or projects.

Let's keep striving for the quality services and programs we are offering the Ithaca Community. What we offer is unique and not found anywhere else. It takes many different people to provide such support – we are doing it and will continue to do it in the future. We need all of your Help and Support.

Thanks to all of you,

Carol Booth, President, NAMI-FL



Ann Carter, NAMI – Finger Lakes member and rally organizer, speaking at 2008 One in Five Rally

From Jean

January 26, 2008

Dear NAMI-Finger Lakes Members and Friends,

What a wonderful completely unexpected surprise you all gave me at our annual meeting last Tuesday evening. You left me speechless with tears not far from the surface.

Carol knows things I like and cherish and the gift choices were perfect. I will cherish the plaque and already have it hanging in my Cayuga Street side office along with others that I have received through the years. Since I am an avid reader, I'll be heading for Barnes and Noble book store very soon with my gift card to find just that right book. I got your message – not one on mental illness! As for the beautiful light green scarf you gave me, it is a perfect match for a new pair of dressy slacks and top outfit that I received from my son Verle A., Dawn, and their four children for Christmas. How lucky can one person get.

Thank you all for your many kindnesses and friendship through the years and for the lovely gifts you gave me at the annual meeting.

With love and best wishes to you all,

Jean Walters

2008 DUES

Dues are a part of the support for our educational and family support activities. In addition, NAMI/FL pays dues to NAMI/NY and NAMI each year, giving us benefits such as cost recovery for the materials used in the Family-to-Family Course. Please help us out by sending in your 2008 dues, if you have not done so. And thanks to all who have!

Individual membership dues: \$25
Family membership dues: \$35

Mail to NAMI-FL, 104 East Lewis Street, Ithaca, NY.

Thank you,
Joanne Denison, NAMI-FL Treasurer

Garage Sale: October 11, 2008

NAMI-FingerLakes will hold a garage sale on October 11 at Jean Walters' house, 104 E. Lewis Street. Last year's sale was a success. We got a chance to donate items we no longer needed for a good cause; visit with other NAMI-Finger Lakes members and friends; and earn money for our affiliate.

We've set the date, so I'm now hoping for definite commitments from all those who expressed willingness to help get ready before the sale and also on the day of the sale. Please let me know by email (SCL8@CORNELL.EDU) or phone (539-7299) if you can help in any way. Anna Moratz has provided an excellent outline of what we need to do. We will need help with: publicity, presale preparations, working at the sale, and cleanup.

I'll keep a list of who will be able to donate and work and send reminders as the day of the sale approaches.

Thanks in advance for any help you can provide.

Susan Larkin (539-7299)

Jean Walters (273-2462)

Benefits Workshop

On March 18, about 30 NAMI – FL members squeezed into the office at 104 East Lewis Street in Ithaca to learn about disability benefits from Kevin Nickerson, Disability Program Navigator, Tompkins County Office of Employment and Training. Kevin spoke and answered questions for over 2 hours, simplifying and clarifying as much as possible the complicated system of federal and state benefits for people with disabilities. It was a remarkable presentation, packed with very practical and critical information. At no other time have I gotten that volume of information (on benefits) from anyone, and nobody has been as clear as Kevin Nickerson. I can't begin to summarize it here, but Kevin is available during business hours for individual appointments in the Tompkins Workforce New York offices in Center Ithaca on the Commons (two floors up from food court). His telephone number is 607-272-7570, extension 136. He also offers a monthly workshop during the day on disability benefits. You can find information on that workshop at <http://www.tompkinsworkforceny.org/> (choose "Calendar" from the left hand column).

I only hope that Kevin loves his job and is taking immortality treatments, because I don't know what we'll do without him or how he could be replaced if he left.

Deb Grantham, NAMI-FL member

2008 One in Five Rally

The weather held off long enough on May 17, 2008 for us to celebrate our work with the community. Our second *One in Five* rally was sponsored by NAMI – Finger Lakes in partnership with the Mental Health Association, Cayuga Medical Center, Compos Mentis, and Mental Health Services of Tompkins County. DeWitt Park proved to be a very pleasant venue, with park benches and walls for seating and trees and shrubs to define a area for the rally. Some members of the public joined us, and others passing by learned a bit about us from banners and signs set around the periphery of the park.

Carol Booth and Ann Carter were the fires behind the rally, recruiting about 25 other volunteers and rounding up some impressive speakers and defining a great agenda. Robert DeLuca, Tompkins County Mental Health Commissioner spoke about local issues; Tom O'Clair, NYS Office of Mental Health, came from Albany to speak about Timothy's Law and other NYS issues, including increasing mental illness among veterans and the continuing dire need for health care insurance and public services; Dr. Henry Gerson, Cayuga Medical Center, spoke about the hospital's work on integrated mental and physical health; Dawn Kucerak, Trumansburg High School, spoke of the value of the Breaking the Silence Education to her students and her children; and family members Bill and Andrea Staffeld, Rebecca Schwed, and Liz

and Deb Grantham spoke about their experiences.



Tom O'Clair, NYS Office of Mental Affairs

The story repeats itself from family to family. It is a story of challenge and pain, as we all know, but there also is joy and miracles can happen and recovery can occur.

Many thanks to our community supporters for their donations: Greenstar, Kinney Drugs/Northside, Walmart, Tops, Ithaca Bakery, and Hickey's Music.



Robert DeLuca, Tompkins County Mental Health Commissioner



NAMI – Finger Lakes members at the rally

NAMI-FL CALENDAR

Support Group: 7-9 PM, First Tuesday of each month at Jean Walter's house, 104 East Lewis Street, (607) 273-2462. Please call first if attending for the first time.

August

5th, Support Group
7th, Compos Mentis potluck
19th, Picnic at Stewart Park
28th, Compos Mentis potluck

September

2nd, Support Group
18th, Board meeting

October

7th, Support Group
11th, Garage Sale, 104 E. Lewis Street
22nd, Wellness Conference, 6 – 9 pm, Borg Warner Room, Tompkins County Public Library

November

4th, Support Group
20th, Board meeting

December

9th, Support Group

January

6th, Support Group

LENDING LIBRARY

NAMI-FL maintains a lending library, adding to it as new books come in. If you would like to browse or borrow, call Jean Walters at (607) 273- 2462 or Carol Booth at (607) 272-6593 and we will arrange a time.

New book: Jean Walters is currently reviewing the new book by Xavier Amador entitled *I'm Right, You're Wrong, Now What? Break the impasse and get what you need*, published 2008. This book will be available in our NAMI-Finger Lakes library. Jean recommends this book as an excellent follow-up for *I'm Not Sick I Don't Need Help*. If you have any questions, please call Jean at 273-2462.

Jean Walters, Manager, NAMI-FL

BOOK AND MOVIE REVIEWS:

In May, I attended *Deadly Ink*, a mystery writers' conference (yep, not kidding, conferences for everything! and this one was loads of fun) in New Jersey. There were panels on where to get inspiration for stories, editing, finding a publisher, and several panels that talked about accuracy in writing (geographic and historical accuracy and murder methods, for example). I had to speak up about accuracy in portraying mental illness in mysteries. Often, the crime is blamed on mental illness, and very inaccurately portrayed mental illness. I can't count how many times I hear people use the term schizophrenia to mean the very outdated concept of "split personality". I pointed writers to the NAMI Web site for good information on mental illness and charged them with the responsibility for portraying it accurately and sympathetically, and helping to break down stigma.

Author Cheryl Solimini was on one of the panels and spoke about the main character in her first mystery having a twin sister with mental illness. She talked about her motivation for including the twin sister

character was the occurrence of mental illness in her family.

Across the River, A Mystery (Deadly Ink Press, 2008) is a fun read about a New York City tabloid reporter who is sent back to her hometown to report on the murder of a child. The book gives a wonderful sense of Andrealisa's childhood New Jersey neighborhood, ethnically Italian and tightly knit. The story is absorbing, the character development is very effective, and I finished it wanting to spend more time with all of them, including Cat, the reporter's twin sister. Cat is portrayed as having early childhood indications of mental illness. Her young adult psychotic break is hinted at, but her relationship with her twin sister is lovingly portrayed. The reader gets a sense of the sisters' attachment, the tightrope that Andrealisa walks at times with her sister, their involvement with each other as sisters, and some of the tough decisions that Andrealisa has had to make concerning her sister's care. I was impressed and moved by the portrayal of relationship. I highly recommend this book, both because it is a very good reading and because it helps to break the silence with readers who might not otherwise read about mental illness.

The book is available on Amazon and Barnes and Noble (on line and see <http://www.acrosstheriver.info>).

Deborah Grantham, NAMI-FL member

WE ARE SEEKING BOOK AND MOVIE REVIEWS. PLEASE CONTACT DEB GRANTHAM, 607-277-5148 OR DGG3@CORNELL.EDU WITH SUBMISSIONS.

EDUCATION

Family-to-Family Education Course

The Family-to-Family course will be taught again in Spring, 2009. For more information, call 273-2462 or 266-8079.

Working with a Community Partner

During February to May 2007, I attended a NAMI Family to Family class in Ithaca. While participating in the class, I realized that much of the material would be extremely helpful to co-workers at my place of employment.

I am a Customer Advocate in the Ithaca location of New York State Electric and Gas (NYSEG) and my duties focus on assisting customers in homes that are protected by the Home Energy Fair Practices Act (HEFPA). Since one in five people have or know someone with a mental health illness, I thought it would be useful to provide a training session to our field personnel who read meters and perform credit and collection activities on a day to day basis.

I approached Jean Walters during a class break and she was very receptive to the idea of working together on this kind of training. After the Family-to-Family sessions ended, I began putting together some ideas and arranged for Carol Booth and Jean Walters to come to NYSEG one morning in September and give a 30 to 45 minute overview of the topic.

Jean provided the background of NAMI-FL and some basics about the most common mental illnesses to a group of approximately 15 to 20 employees. Carol

also provided some common symptoms that may be recognized by the field personnel. Once those symptoms are identified, communication techniques can be modified to respond to the customer with a mental illness. Carol briefly described, and gave examples of, the “I” statements and “reflective” listening responses to the group. Literature was handed out and information about who to call for assistance if they suspect a customer has a mental health illness and may need some assistance. Evaluations completed by the attendees indicated an overwhelming need for more information about the communication techniques and time to practice them in a group. I am in the process of working out the logistics for another session this summer or early autumn.

Once my supervisor in Binghamton learned of the session I coordinated and facilitated, she asked me to do one for my fellow advocates from across the state (from Plattsburgh down to Brewster and west to Lockport) as the kick-off to a two-day training session in April.

Since I only had 45 minutes to do a presentation, I again worked with Carol on suggestions. I wanted to do the most powerful exercise I remembered from the Family-to-Family sessions and also an overview. I used the literature from NAMI that describes the major mental illnesses to create a training packet that included a table showing the symptoms for each of the major illnesses. This made it easier to see how some symptoms are similar between the illnesses. I also added a table from the NAMI website with the NAMI locations and phone numbers from across New York State. During the session, I had the 15 to 18 people break into two groups

so we could do the Empathy exercise. This is the exercise where one group acts as the “consumer” with an illness and another group acts as “others”. We then discussed the exercise and how we felt during the exercise. Many of them began to realize how these illnesses can impact a person’s daily functions and helped them understand better why some customers don’t remember to “follow through” as they promised. We then proceeded to discuss in more detail some communication guidelines and any personal experiences with either customers or family/friends that they were comfortable sharing. After the session, at least two fellow advocates admitted to having a family member with a mental health illness and how the information provided was accurate and helpful.

These two training sessions are the first to be performed in a corporate setting in the NAMI-Finger Lakes area. I truly enjoy doing this and hope to pursue this in the future both at my own company and maybe others as requested. I believe these types of sessions help erase the stigma associated with these illnesses.

Sherry Scott, NAMI-FL member and Board Member

**COMPOS MENTIS: Working Toward
Wellness in Ithaca, NY**
www.composmentisithaca.org

Compos Mentis has started its second season at the farm on Garrett Road, off Route 96, five miles north of Ithaca.

We provide a day program for adults who are dealing with depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or other serious

mental illness. A program coordinator, a program assistant, and trained volunteers work alongside the apprentices in the gardens and at the Cayuga Nature Center as they work and learn – about ecology, agriculture, and how to deal with mental illness. Afternoons are more relaxed with time for art, writing, movement, poetry readings, nature hikes, and discussions pertinent to recovery and getting back on track. Our day lasts from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm, Monday through Friday.



Mural in Compos Mentis shelter created by visiting artist, Luella Barlow, and 2007 apprentices and volunteers (photo by Susan Larkin)

Anyone interested in learning more about the farm is welcome to come out to Open Fridays, a new program this year. Spending time at the farm, working in the gardens and sharing lunch and conversation is a wonderful way to find out what the program is all about. There are no commitments – just come and see what’s happening at the farm. People who are interested in coming out on an Open Friday should call Paula at 592-2390 or Shannon at 229-6392 by 12:00 noon on the prior Thursday. The day starts at 9:00 am

and ends at 3:00 pm. Guests are welcome to stay for all of the day or only part of the day. Those who plan to stay during the mid-day meal should bring their own lunch. There may be a seasonal dish from the garden to supplement what you bring.

We also welcome visitors at our potluck dinners that will be held at the farm in the evenings from 5:30-8:00 pm on the following dates:

Thursday, August 7

Thursday, August 28

If you would like to be on the mailing list, please let me know.

Susan Larkin, NAMI-FL member
Compos Mentis Volunteer