



**Instructions on How to Write a
Successful Fundraising Letter**

(Sample Letters included!)



National Alliance on Mental Illness

One of the most powerful and effective ways to fight the stigma that surrounds serious mental illness and to educate the public about the prevalence, cause and treatment of the illness is telling your personal story of why you are involved in NAMI. Many of misconceptions disappear when people talk about how a mental illness has affected themselves, their family and their friends.

Patrick Corrigan, Professor of Psychiatry at the Illinois Institute of Technology is the principal investigator at the Chicago Consortium for Stigma Research. Dr. Corrigan, a leading authority on the stigma related to mental illness has stated in his findings that the most effective method to combat these erroneous beliefs is to expose people directly to an individual that is successfully coping with a serious mental illness, either directly or through their support system of family and friends. It is this personal contact, according to the Consortium's research, that allows the public to see mental illness for what it is – a disorder of the brain that strikes indiscriminately.

The foundation of the *NAMIWALKS for the Mind of America* is the process that encourages NAMI members and supporters to write letters and send emails to everyone in their personal and professional networks to educate them on mental illness and NAMI. This personal communication also is the way to ask that the reader to join and/or support the NAMIWALK in their community. It is through this letter and email campaign that we can begin to have a meaningful impact on the stigma related to this issue and successfully reach out to the segment of the community that could benefit from knowing about NAMI programs.

The attached selection of letters is a sampling of the thousands and thousands stories told each year in communities across the country. These letters were written by walkers to their friends and colleagues as they do their part to:

- To raise awareness about mental illness
- To increase community education and reach out to new families and individuals living with mental illness
- To support local NAMI affiliates
- To build a larger NAMI community

If you would like to use your letter to inspire others to collect funds like the samples provided in this packet, please send it to your Walk Manager.



National Alliance on Mental Illness

10 KEY STEPS IN A LETTER WRITING OR EMAILING FUND-RAISING CAMPAIGN

1. Write your letter/email. Say what you are doing and why you are doing it. Tell your personal story and make it clear why supporting the **NAMIWALKS For The Mind of America** walkathon is important to you and your family.
2. Mail/email it to family members, friends, co-workers and business associates (try using your holiday card mailing list!) 3 to 10 weeks before the walkathon.
3. Consider enclosing a copy of your walker pledge sheet with your personal pledge on it so everyone knows that you are personally contributing to the cause you are asking them to support.
4. State your personal and team fund-raising goals in your letter. The higher the better!
5. Include in your letter some information on the important work being done by NAMI.
6. Be sure to say that all donations are tax-deductible and that checks should be made payable to **NAMI** (The National Alliance on Mental Illness).
7. Also be sure to say that you would like the donation sent to you by the date of the Walk so you can turn it in then. Enclose a return envelope if possible. (Donations should be returned directly to you so you can keep track of your supporters and personally thank everyone after the Walk.)
8. Remember to include on your mailing list any vendors, consultants and business people with whom you or your spouse may work. These people tend to make larger donations since they often will make them from their business checking account rather than from a personal checking account.
9. Remember to send thank you notes after the Walk to everyone who sponsors you.
10. Remember that the more people you mail to, the more money you will raise for NAMI and the support, education, advocacy and research programs it supports.

May, 2004

We are writing this letter to ask for your support for a project we are involved in. It is called *NAMI Walks for the Mind of America*, an awareness/fundraising walk for Mental Illness.

Our involvement with NAMI (the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) began about 8 years ago when one of our sons was diagnosed with schizophrenia as a young adult. (One in five families will be affected by mental illnesses like schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder and others sometime in their lifetime.) We ourselves were confused and anxious about how we could help him live a normal life. NAMI was a life saver for us. Roz took their Family to Family Education Course and found the education and support that we needed to help us understand what could have been a devastating illness. Alex also joined the Board of Trustees of NAMI of Hamilton County for a few years, while Roz, at one point, was president of NAMI of Warren County. Currently, Roz is the Executive Director of NAMI of Hamilton County.

The mission of NAMI is to provide support, education, and advocacy to families and individuals affected by mental illness and to promote research on mental illnesses/brain disorders. Here in Southwest Ohio, our major focus is on education through the Family to Family Education Course, many and various support groups, and advocating for better insurance coverage for mental illnesses. We also speak out about stigma and discrimination related to mental illnesses.

So, on May 15 we will be leading a Walk Team at Winton Woods Park at 9 AM. Please join us. Our team goal is to raise \$2000. With your help we know it's possible.

If you don't think you'll be able to participate in the Walk, a donation/pledge to support us would be GREATLY APPRECIATED! You can use the enclosed envelope and make a check payable to NAMI of Hamilton County. We would like to turn in all of our supporters' pledges/contributions on May 15.

Please call, 513-697-1857, if you have questions and let us know if you'll be walking with us. Otherwise, we'll look for your support in the mail!

Sincerely,

Roz and Alex Dadas

P.S. Roz adds: This Walk is very important to me and the work I do in the mental health field. NAMI of Hamilton County receives no taxpayer support nor does it receive funding from the United Way. All of our income is derived from memberships, donations and small grants from foundations. **So if NAMI of Hamilton County is going to continue to provide education, support and advocacy for people and families affected by mental illness, we need to raise \$50,000 from this walk.** A small percentage of our net proceeds will go back to NAMI national which supports NAMI affiliates around the country.

Dear family and friends,

Over the years, many families have persevered through the trials and tribulations of an extremely pervasive, yet most often misunderstood illness -- mental illness. Forms of this illness run in our family, and among our friends and colleagues. It can take many forms, including temporary clinical depression, eating disorders, teen suicide, substance abuse, bipolarity (manic depression), schizophrenia, post-partum depression. While many people we know have happily recovered, we are aware of the persistent stigma towards mental illness, the inadequacies of the mental health system, discriminatory public policies and the hopelessness among people with untreated mental disorders.

On May 1st, all six of us will be joining over five hundred walkers in Richmond for the Second Annual NAMIWALKS for the Mind of America. This walk will be held in 38 states to raise awareness for the disease. The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) hopes to raise \$3 Million for research into the causes of mental illness and for world-class treatment and recovery systems.

Through support, advocacy, education and research, NAMI has been a champion for our family and thousands of others. We have set a goal of \$1,000 to raise as our contribution towards this cause. We are also raising the money to honor our mother/mother-in-law/grandmother, Deborah Michael, who is president of NAMI, Central Virginia. She has logged countless hours promoting NAMI to the community and organizing this walk. We invite you to sponsor us by clicking the link below to make an online donation on our behalf. Contributions are tax deductible.

www.nami.org/walkdonation.cfm?id=289

If you prefer, you may send donations to us at our home address and we will have them credited to our team total. Checks can be made out to NAMI Central Virginia and sent to:

Our dear friends and family,

Anyone receiving this letter knows what Sam and I (and Mindy) have been doing over the past ten years. In fact, we've been SO involved that it has become our number # 1 topic of conversation. You say "Whatcha been up to?", and we go the whole nine yards on Mental Illness. Small wonder that you might have a slightly glazed look in your eye by the time we come to the end of our mantra!

It HAS been a rough ten years with Mindy and Mental Illness. And, each of you has been an absolute ROCK (pardon the geologic pun) of support for us. Many times, Sam and I would have collapsed without your understanding and love for us. We've learned a great deal about human suffering through this experience. We've become more humble through this experience, and more grateful for our GOOD fortune, of which there is much! And, we've shared a lot of sadness with many people, friends and strangers alike, from mental illness to cancer. It has not been at all unusual for one of you to say, in confidence and relief "You know, I have a brother....." It has become pretty apparent to us that mental illness strikes all over the place, and is a major, major problem in our society. Not only for the ADAMS', but also for many of you, and many others!

You also probably know that for the last five years, Sam and I have been involved, then VERY involved in National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI). We found out about it from a fellow-geologist whom we had known for years, from Texas. One night, we wives were talking about family, and she was telling me about their mentally ill son. I shrieked "OH, We have one of those too!" She told us about the caring support system of NAMI, for families of mentally ill, and Sam and I got involved. First, we took a course called Family to Family, 12 weeks curriculum taught by trained family members to family members, to help everyone learn how to live with a pretty difficult situation, and yet still take care of our own lives. Then Sam and I became the trained teachers, and taught the course in Littleton, NH. Then we became Board members for NAMI NH, and very most recently, Sam has become the president of our NAMI NH State chapter.

Well, wanting to have an identity of my own, I found myself agreeing to become the Events Coordinator of NAMI's NH WALKATHON! First-ever significant fund-raising, stigma busting event for mental illness. The WALK is being piloted in 12 states and is a NAMI national project. NAMI National is guiding me through the process of setting up a major walk, in Manchester, on Sunday, May 18. It's confusing, and exciting!

Most exciting is that the money we raise from this walk will stay in NH, with only a small amount to be directed to NAMI National for administrative assistance.. We will be able to start new programs in NH (like our Family to Family), and pursue research and recovery programs.

So, "What have we been up to?" Sam and I will be putting together a 'family' team of walkers and supporters, called MINDY'S MIRACLES, who would help us raise this money for NAMI NH. This is a 5 K walk (NOT RUN). We hope to have 50-60 friends and family walking with us. We will be wearing bright team T shirts, designed by nephew Jeff Martel of OD Design. The other family teams will be wearing their own version of T shirt, so it should be a colorful event! We'll sing and holler and make a lot of noise, and have a lot of fun!

We wish each and every one of you could join us. Obviously, many of you are too far away. If you can walk with us, bring your own friends and family. Raise money from your own friends and family who do cannot walk with us. (You can see it is kinda a pyramid effect!). There is no set amount, no amount per mile. Just MONEY; a check made out to 'NAMI NH, and sent to us. We obviously would love to have your support in person, but will know that your hearts are with us from your generosity!

Checks to NAMI NH; Nancy Adams, 106B Arlington St, Manchester, NH 03104

****This letter was sent via email only. Amount raised \$1,056****

April 7, 2004

Dear Family and Friends,

As many of you know, for the past five years I have worked at NAMI, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, first at the national office and now for NAMI Massachusetts. Little did I know that working for NAMI would become a calling of sorts.

Millions of Americans, involving an estimated one in four families, are living with mental illness: schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, panic & anxiety disorders and others. More startling is the fact that the total cost of mental health services in the US is now estimated to be over \$200 billion a year, in treatment costs and in displaced cost caused by lack of available treatment. For some, an experience with mental illness is short, say post-partum depression. For others, it is a lifelong struggle to understand, overcome, and live with persistent and unpredictable symptoms.

If any family could have benefited from NAMI in the past, it is mine. NAMI provides support, education, and advocacy to individuals living with mental illness and their families. NAMI families put a face on an often scary diagnosis and make it approachable. My family has experienced both tragedy and triumph in the face of mental illness. My grandmother drowned in 1953 when my father was 9 years old. No one ever talked about her, that she struggled with depression, and the very strong probability that her drowning was a suicide. My uncle Wayne struggled with manic depression throughout his life; he was one of the most sensitive, compassionate, wise, and beloved men I have ever known and was very special to me.

My brother, Rafe, first got sick with bipolar disorder when I was in my early teens. As I've grown to adulthood, he and I have become friends, and I believe I can credit the trajectory that my life and career have taken on my search to understand what was happening to my family. I can't express how proud I am of my brother and his continuing efforts to succeed. Everyone has difficulties thrown in their path on the journey of life, but my brother has learned how to shine in spite of his. Learning to live with mental illness, as with any other physical ailment like diabetes or cancer, can be difficult, but definitely not impossible. Having the support of one's family is so essential to success and well-being.

My grandmother lived in an era in which there were few successful treatments for mental illness. I am committed to changing that for my generation and the next, to educating people that mental illness is an illness like any other and that there are treatments that work.

On May 22, 2004, I will be participating in *NAMI WALKS for the Mind of America*, an event to raise awareness about mental illness, to reach out to new families, and to raise money for support and education in local communities. **I want to ask you to walk with me. If you're interested, create your own team. Or support me with a donation.** Visit www.namimass.org for more information about the WALK, or follow this direct link: <http://www.nami.org/walkdonation.cfm?id=563> to make a donation specifically in my name. (You will have to register, as when you pay your bills online, but the site will not disclose your personal information for any mailing lists or unauthorized purposes.) **If you prefer to send a check, please make it out to NAMI Massachusetts and send it to my home address in East Boston** (I'll collect and submit all donations). Personally, I am contributing \$100, and my goal is to build a team of at least 20 people and raise \$2,500.

Please let me know if I can provide you with any more information about mental health or mental illness, in Massachusetts or in your own community. Thank you. WALK on!

Love,
Kara

To my family and friends:

March 24, 2003

I am writing this letter with the help of my family to tell you about a project we are involved in. It is called **"NAMI Walks for the Mind of America"** an awareness/ fund raising walkathon for Mental Illness.

Our involvement with NAMI began in 1995 when I returned home from serving 3 years in the US Navy. I enrolled at our local university and began experiencing depression and other symptoms that neither I nor my family knew how to handle. I struggled as the symptoms got worse. With much counseling and psychological testing, I was eventually diagnosed with Schizophrenia. I was 26 at that time and too old to be covered under my parents insurance so I had to depend on the state system for my care. My parents could not get any information about my illness from the professionals without my permission and I was too ill to give permission. I could not understand that my parents were trying to help me. My mother did what she always does and began searching for answers at our local university. She looked for any information she could find on mental illness and support groups. There in the back of a medical journal she found the organization called NAMI, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill. After getting in touch with them, she was given the name of a local contact person... There began my parents' involvement in NAMI SWLA. My parents tell me how caring and supportive the families in the local support group were. Through their monthly meetings, education classes and experiences, my parents received tremendous help in dealing with my illness. Today my mother is president of NAMI SWLA and has been for the last 4 years. My Dad has given up 1/3 of his office space to allow NAMI SWLA to have a home of its own. I live on my own, take part in a day program with Volunteers of America, and volunteer at our church and the NAMI SWLA office. I am attempting to get a part-time job and hope to eventually work full time. Our experiences are not unique since 1 out of every 4 people nation wide is diagnosed with mental illnesses. NAMI has provided help and services to thousands of people and their families since it was founded in 1979. Our family journey has not been easy, but with the help of NAMI the journey has been easier.

The common message of NAMI is support, education, advocacy and research. NAMI SWLA services are free of charge. It is a total volunteer organization. NAMI helps in many ways:

It provides support to persons with serious brain disorders and to their families

It advocates for nondiscriminatory policies

It advocates for improved opportunities for housing, rehabilitation and meaningful jobs

It supports research

It supports education programs designed to help educate and remove stigma surrounding severe mental illness.

I am so thankful that my parents got involved with NAMI. It has helped them to understand my illness so they could better help me. And you can help also. On May 24, 2003 the first ever **"NAMI Walks for the Mind of America"** walkathon (3.1 miles) will be held on the Lake Charles Civic Center grounds beginning at 9 AM. The NAMI SWLA affiliate has been chosen as one of only 12 pilot sites in the United States to host this event. Please show your support by joining us on this day and walk on the **Raichel Family Team**. Team t-shirts will be available for all walkers on our team. Please fill out the attached form with names of any friends or family that you invite to walk on our team. Please include T-shirts sizes.

If you are unable to walk with our team, but would like to make a donation, that would be greatly appreciated. Please make your check payable to NAMI SWLA and send to the address on the attached sheet. At least 95% of the funds donated will stay in the Southwest Louisiana which covers a 5 parish area. This money will help continue the work that is already in progress as well as expanding to other programs. If you have any questions you can call my mom at 337-433-0219 or email her at craichel@aol.com.

Sincerely,

Mike Raichel, NAMI SWLA Member

cc: Stanley & Clarice Raichel