

The foundation of the NAMIWALKS for the Mind of America is the process that encourages NAMI members and supporters to write letters and send e-mails to everyone in their personal and professional networks to educate them on mental illness and NAMI.

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 them, 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's research findings state 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.

This personal communication also is the way to ask the reader to join and/or support NAMIWALKS. It is through this letter and e-mail campaign that we can begin to have a meaningful impact on the stigma related to this issue and successfully reach out to our community that will 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 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.

10 Steps for Successful Letters & E-mails

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 your letter to family members, friends, co-workers and business associates 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 awareness and the more money you will raise to support, education, and advocacy programs.

Writing Successful Fund Raising Letters...

Dear

As the winter slowly recedes, Ruth & I wanted to let you know how our life is going. Things are changing in dramatic fashion. After 39 years of having children at home, we are now empty nesters. Our youngest daughter, Beth, moved into transitional housing the first of February. As you know Beth has suffered from mental illness for the past 6 years. It has been a difficult time for her and all who know and love her. Since last April (her last hospitalization) she has been doing quite well, with the exception of some temporary setbacks with the transitional housing. She worked at Marshall's in Newburyport with the help of the Haverhill Clubhouse and is again enrolled in class at Northern Essex Community College (NECCO). She is now on her own with the help of a great case manager.

These past years have been not only a trying experience but a learning one. One of the best supports we obtained, was when we went to a NAMI sponsored class called "Family to Family". We didn't realize that there was such a support group available.

So now that Beth is stable we wish to give something back. As members of NAMI, we have learned that there are literally thousands of people who do not know of or have access to the services and support that we have discovered. Therefore, Ruth and I have decided that we will be Team Captains of "Budda's Buddies"; a group who will be walking on May 22nd in the first annual NAMI walk for the "Mind of America" in Boston along the Charles River. For those of you who have not been recently acquainted with Beth, Budda is the name of her Norwegian long tailed rat. Budda is her "Baby".

The purpose of this walk is two-fold: one – to raise the awareness of the plight of the mentally ill in our communities and across the country, and secondly to raise funds.

For those of you who are unaware NAMI (the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) is a non-profit organization which strives to improve the lives of those touched by mental illness through education, by fighting stigma, and by providing a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves.

We do believe NAMI will be one of the major driving forces to help improving the care mentally ill people receive. "Recovery is understood as a process through which skills for living with mental illness are acquired and deployed through varying phases of illness and wellness, regardless of age or diagnosis." We are fully aware that there are many people much sicker than Beth, who have little or now family support or outside support.

We invite you to join us in this happy occasion by joining us on May 22nd. For those of you who would like to walk (It's only 3 miles with shortcuts available) but cannot contribute, we say, "Come on down". For those who can't walk but can contribute we say "Thanks". 92+% of all moneys raised goes to local programs. For every paid NAMI personnel there are over 1,000 volunteers who contribute time and energy to keep this going. This is definitely a grassroots effort to reach and help those who are unable or unaware of the resources available in their community. Please make checks payable to NAMI-Mass, and mail them to us. We will turn them in before the walk. All donations are tax deductible.

Hope we hear from you soon.

Charlie & Ruth Lambert
6 Highland Ave
Newburyport, MA 01950
busterrll@aol.com

Writing Successful Fund Raising Letters...

(NAMI Northwest WALK – 2003)



Dear Family and Friends,

Over the past couple of decades my family and I have persevered through the trials and tribulations of an extremely pervasive, yet most often misunderstood illness to besiege mankind – Mental Illness. My father, brother, and I have persisted through the dark, desolate, debilitating depths of major depression, while my sister braves on through the tormenting ravages of schizoaffective disorder.

We have each struggled through a disease that robbed us of our will to live and distorted our cognition, compelling us to take our lives. We have each persisted through the persistent societal stigma and pervasive misunderstandings about mental illness.

Together, we have endured through multiple hospitalizations, a slew of medications, ECTs (Electro Convulsive Therapy), endless hours of therapy, and significant life style changes. And, each of us has ultimately triumphed in coping with our illness. Over the years, each of us has evolved into highly functional, contributing members of our families and communities. However, without the unflinching faith and undying love of our mother, our spouses and children, adequate medical care, and a lifetime's commitment to cope with our respective mental illness, our lives could have been greatly compromised.

It is through **Education** that we have found empowerment, through **Advocacy** that we have actualized advancement, and through **Support** that we have secured the sustenance required to overcome the challenges of living with mental illness.

Through our journeys and triumph in overcoming mental illness was born an undeterred resolve that each of us in our family would evolve to be a “**Guiding Light**” to dispel the darkness that shrouds mental illness.

While my family and I rejoice in our recovery, we are painfully aware of the persistent stigma toward mental illness, the inadequacies of the mental health system, discriminatory public policies, and the resultant hopelessness that entraps people with mental illness, and endangers their lives.

In **May 2003**, thousands of concerned citizens will march together in thirteen communities across America to raise money and awareness about our country's need for a world-class treatment and recovery system for people with mental illness. Please visit www.nami.org and experience the revolution!

On **May 18, 2003**, my sister and I will be joining thousands of walkers in **Portland, OR** in the **First Annual NAMI WALKS for the Mind of America**. We invite you to be a “**Guiding Lights**” and walk with us, sponsor us, or better yet recruit your own team of walkers! The goal for my sister and I is to raise \$5,000, and it is our privilege to inform you that we are well on our way with having already raised \$2,000. Attached is the information pertaining to the Walk.

Your generous contributions are tax deductible (Federal Tax ID # 93-0875209) and, please make it payable to NAMI Northwest WALK, and mail to:

Gayathri Ramprasad – NAMI Oregon
2620 Greenway Drive NE
Salem, OR 97301

Thank you for your kind support.
Gayathri Ramprasad

Writing Successful Fund Raising Letters...



June 12, 2007

Dear Blair,

I am writing you today to tell you about an upcoming event that I am participating in that is both very important and very exciting to me. It is NAMIWALKS for the Mind of America, NAMI's signature walkathon event that is being held in **Chicago at Grant Park on September 23, 2007.**

I've formed a team called "Chicago Knows Blues" and I'm hoping that you can help me raise awareness about mental illness and much needed funds for NAMI programs. There are so many reasons why I am devoted to this cause, but here's one example of why I work so passionately for NAMIWALKS:

Sonny is an old man who I see in my DC neighborhood from time to time. He's got a warm smile and worn leathery skin. He walks with a crutch and carries his belongings on his back. I usually see him sitting in his favorite spot on the steps of the Catholic grade school. Sometimes, I take him a bottle of water and a snack on my way back from the convenience store. He always rewards me with a smile.

I've often suspected that Sonny has a mental illness which leads me to wondering a lot of things. How long has he lived on the street? Where's he at when he is not around the neighborhood? Has he ever been incarcerated? Has he ever spent time in a psychiatric hospital? Is he estranged from his family? All of these things are possible for someone with a severe mental illness who does not receive adequate care.

It's easy to think that Sonny lives on the street because he's stubborn and refuses treatment, but in reality many persons with a severe mental illness lack the insight to realize that they are sick and need help. Think about it. If someone has hallucinations and paranoia it's not hard to believe that they might not be able to see the reality of their own illness. NAMI advocates for people like Sonny by helping to educate families about the treatment options available and coaches them in how to help someone accept treatment. I often think of a quotation that I read in the Washington Post back in 2002:

"We wouldn't let our 80-year old mother with Alzheimer's live on a grate. Why is it all right for a 30-year-old daughter with schizophrenia?"

I would like to ask you to come and walk with me or to donate to support my participation in this event. Visit my page to sign up: www.nami.org/namiwalks07/GCH/blues. You can also click on my name to go to my personal walker page to donate in support of me online.

Donating online is fast and secure, and I'll get immediate notification via e-mail of your donation. Please save that e-mail notification to use as your receipt. NAMI is a 501(c)3 charity and any donation you make to support my participation in this event is tax deductible.

Thank you in advance for your support. I *really* appreciate it.

Sincerely,

Erin