



The Times

NAMI Pinellas County, Florida
National Alliance on Mental Illness

Clearwater - Dunedin - Largo - Oldsmar - Palm Harbor - Pinellas Park - St. Petersburg - Tarpon Springs

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

March 3rd--May 19th
Family-to-Family Class
Tuesdays. See Page 8.

Thursday, March 5th
7:00 p.m.--NAMI Pinellas
Education Meeting
*How You Can Help Stimulate
the Stimulus Plan*

Thursday, March 19th
7:30 p.m.-- Family Support
Group Meeting

Thursday, April 2nd
7:00 p.m.--NAMI Pinellas
Education Meeting
*Everything You Wanted to
Know About Guardianships
But Were Afraid to Ask*

Thursday, April 16th
7:30 p.m.-- Family Support
Group Meeting

April 18th--June 20th
Peer-to-Peer Class
Saturdays. See Page 5.

Saturday, May 2nd
11:00 a.m. -- 2:00 p.m.
PICNIC IN THE PARK
FREE--Anderson Park
Tarpon Springs

All meetings are held at:
The Hospice of the
Florida Suncoast
5771 Roosevelt Blvd.
Building 100
The Gathering Place
Clearwater, FL 33760

VISIT OUR WEB SITE
www.nami-pinellas.org

WHY DO WE DO WHAT WE DO AT NAMI?

By Gay Hawk, Vice President

In each issue of *The Times*, we give you information about all the educational programs we offer FREE to the community. We talk about the support programs that are led by consumers and family members to help others cope with the challenges they face when they learn a loved one has mental illness. We keep you up to date about our legislative advocacy efforts and share with you lots of tips about how to meet with legislators to share the NAMI perspective on crucial mental health and substance abuse issues.

WHY? Because at NAMI, it is our goal to make it as easy as possible for you to stay aware of the latest information related to mental illness, medication and treatment options, research, education and support opportunities, public policy, and the full range of mental health services.

WHY? Because there's very little left in the world that is truly free, and we believe it should be easy to access basic education about the topics that

Spring Education Meetings

MARCH 5th – HOW YOU CAN HELP STIMULATE THE STIMULUS PLAN featuring **Paul Weinberger**, Financial Advisor, and **Peggy Cozine**, Tax Specialist, from **Gilman & Ciocia and Travis Finchum** from **Karol, Hausman, Sosnik & Finchum, LLP**, who is a long-term member of the NAMI Advisory Board. They will talk to us about taxes, estate giving and special needs trusts. Learn how to donate to NAMI while continuing to live comfortably during your retirement. Ask questions about the tax benefits of donating to a charitable organization. Learn how to set up a trust to help safeguard funds needed to support your family members with mental illness.

APRIL 4th—EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT GUARDIANSHIPS BUT WERE AFRAID TO ASK featuring Correy Pastore, President of the Guardian

would make our lives less challenging.

WHY? Because we have talked to thousands of people in our communities who are desperate to find help, support, information and guidance about how to cope with mental illnesses.

Recently the NAMI Pinellas County Board of Directors met in a strategic planning session to look at what we are doing and WHY. We have asked for input from our members, but no one has come forward to tell us what they need. We conducted a brief survey in a recent newsletter, but no one responded. We present a variety of topics at free education sessions, but attendance has dropped and most members do not attend.

So, once again we ask **WHY?** On the back page of this issue is a brief survey. We ask that you take a few minutes to complete it for us. Just tear off the entire page and send it back to us. We are asking *you* to answer some of the WHY questions. So please, return our survey so you can report to your friends and colleagues that you helped shape the future of YOUR local NAMI affiliate.



Association of Pinellas County, who will discuss the various types of guardianship available and how to become a legal guardian to make decisions for your family members when they are unable to make their own life decisions. Guardians help safeguard the rights of individuals who no longer can make those decisions for themselves.

members when they are unable to make their own life decisions. Guardians help safeguard the rights of individuals who no longer can make those decisions for themselves.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE SURVEY ON PAGE 12 TO HELP GUIDE THE FUTURE OF NAMI. RETURN THE SURVEY TO NAMI PINELLAS COUNTY. THANKS, WE APPRECIATE YOUR INPUT!

THIS ISSUE OF
The Times

IS SPONSORED BY AN ANONYMOUS DONOR. THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROUS SUPPORT.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Spring is just around the corner and time for flowers and trees to come into bloom – a sign of new and exciting changes. This is also the time of the year when we provide two of our signature education classes – Family-to-Family and Peer-to-Peer. These classes are only held twice a year – once in the spring and once in the fall.

When we first took the Family-to-Family course, I thought, “Where was this program when our loved one was first diagnosed?” If we would have had that knowledge from the beginning, we would have been able to make better decisions and learn the important coping skills to help us get through the many crises we were to face. We would have learned about the various mental illnesses, types of treatment available, and problem solving. We also would have learned from other family members’ experiences. It was such a tremendous learning experience we decided to teach the first class in Pinellas County.

At the November Education Meeting, graduates of the Peer-to-Peer class, many of whom are Veterans who have served our country, spoke about how important the training has been for them. It brought tears to everyone’s eyes. You can see and hear their testimonies by viewing the NAMI Pinellas County video on our web site www.nami-pinellas.org.

These training programs are dynamic. They are an investment in your future. We hope that you will take advantage of this invaluable learning opportunity by registering to take these classes as soon as possible. They are free of charge – but the value is priceless!

Springtime also means picnic time.



PRESIDENT JUDY TURNBAUGH

Can you believe this will be our 13th Annual Picnic in the Park! Please mark your calendars for Saturday, May 2nd, 2009, 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (rain or shine), Anderson Park (Shelters 4 and 5), 39699 US Highway 19N, Tarpon Springs, FL 34689.

We also will present Iris Awards at the picnic to all those individuals who have “gone above and beyond” to improve the lives of persons with a mental illness.

One more thing.....PLEASE complete the survey on page 12 and let us know what you want us to do to meet your needs. Also, if you would like to be placed on our E-mail mailing list to receive important news as it happens, please complete the application form and enter your e-mail address and mail it in.

Wishing you all a lovely spring!

**BECOME A MEMBER OF
NAMI PINELLAS COUNTY.
COMPLETE THE FORM ON
PAGE 11 AND RETURN IT
WITH OUR SURVEY
FROM PAGE 12.
THANKS!**

NAMI PINELLAS COUNTY 2009 TRANSITION TEAM

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Mailing Address:

466 94th Avenue N.
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www.nami-pinellas.org

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This newsletter is written and published by the Board of Directors of NAMI Pinellas County, Florida. Edited and designed by Vice President Gay Hawk. To contribute articles, e-mail to: turnj@aol.com

**visit us on-line at
www.nami-pinellas.org**

NEWSLETTER SEEKS SPONSOR

NAMI Pinellas is seeking a donor to sponsor the publication of our newsletter *The Times*. If you are interested, please contact our President Judy Turnbaugh at turnj@aol.com or call 727-942-8140. We can publish information about your donation to thank you for your support, or your donation can remain anonymous.



Stacy Freskos shared her retirement cake with NAMI members after the January Education Meeting. One of their first staff members, Stacy retired from Vincent House the next day and was "roasted" at a surprise party given in her honor. Photo by Stephen Thompson

WANTED: GUARDIAN ADVOCATES!

Bob Dillinger, Public Defender, has contacted NAMI in search of volunteers who are interested in becoming Guardian Advocates for patients at PEMHS.

Guardian Advocates volunteer to take a four-hour course and then are assigned clients who have been Baker Acted, if they are unable to make treatment decisions on their own or have no family who can help them when they are inpatient. Decisions are often needed for medication and other treatment-related issues.

Per the Baker Act attorney, the Guardian Advocates who help clients at PEMHS usually do not visit with the clients directly, but apparently only interact with the nurses and staff.

According to Mr. Dillinger, "There is a shortage of guardian advocates. I was hopeful NAMI could recommend volunteers to help out in this regard and perhaps also have the time to visit with these clients. If you could please spare a few hours each month to assist fill the need for Guardian Advocates, it would be very much appreciated."

Please contact the Public Defender's Office if you can spare a few hours each month to assist with filling the need for Guardian Advocates.

"Those willing to give up a little liberty for a little security deserve neither security nor liberty." Benjamin Franklin 1759

KUDOS KORNER

.....to **Stacy Freskos** on her retirement. Stacy was one of the first employees of Vincent House, is a former president of the NAMI Board of Directors and has led a NAMI support group for many years. I'm sure we'll think of something else Stacy can do for NAMI to help her ease into retirement.

.....to **Tom Riggs** on his retirement after 21 years as President/CEO of Directions for Mental Health. Tom also was active on statewide planning groups and boards of directors and the community will miss his leadership and advocacy work.

....to **David Lomaka** on his appointment to the position of President/CEO of Directions for Mental Health.

....to **EVERYONE** who wrote letters and made calls as advocates to ask the governor to veto the bill that would have slashed funding to mental health services. Cuts were made but were not as drastic as originally reported.

...to **'Chelle Grooms of PEMHS and Barbara Daire of Suncoast Community Mental Health** who responded so quickly to assist two individuals who called the NAMI HelpLine for help with family members. Both people called the HelpLine back again to report how helpful we were in finding emergency services for their loved ones. This is true example of effective collaboration between NAMI and community resources. Thanks to each of you for helping us with these callers' when they reached out to NAMI for help!

CALLERS REACH OUT TO NAMI

It all started in late December when a caller received a Social Security notice indicating that due to disability overpayments from 2005 -- 2008, their monthly checks would be reduced by \$224 for two years. The family member asked for a meeting so an explanation could be obtained; Social Security sent a six-page form to complete: "Application for Waiver of Overpayments". There was no explanation of alleged overpayments and no indication of who was at fault. It took family member three hours to complete the form and the attachments added. There has been no response yet.

Early in 2009 a consumer was refused medications at the pharmacy as the HMO did not have her listed. Family called the HMO who reported there was a nationwide computer glitch and the problem would be corrected in 3-5 days; so, "pay the \$327.59 charge and file for a refund." Thirteen days later, the glitch was not fixed and another \$371.84 was paid. Finally, everything was listed at the HMO, but then they said three of the 8 meds "are not on our approved formulary", and you must get an alternative or have the doctor file a request for an exception. Fortunately, the pharmacy gave a six day supply (for cash), and approval finally given. Still awaiting refund.

NAMI VIDEO HAS POWERFUL MESSAGE

"If I had not found NAMI, I would have died," said one of the consumers interviewed during recent taping for a video produced by NAMI Pinellas County. Funds for production of the 5-minute video were donated by Carolyn Hammond in loving memory of her late husband Tom Hammond.

According to NAMI Pinellas President Judy Turnbaugh, "The video was developed as an aid to help describe the local educational and support services that NAMI offers at no cost to the commu-

nity." The video can be used by providers to help with discharge planning; NAMI members when sharing the NAMI message with their civic organizations or community groups; and schools to help teachers inform students about where help is available, she added.

The video can be viewed on our local web site at www.nami-pinellas.org. Copies of the DVD are available free of charge by contacting our NAMI association office at 727-209-0890. Please help us share the NAMI message.



Carolyn Hammond

SOCIAL SECURITY ALERT

By John Jones, Past President

Many of us are aware that it takes diligent effort to establish social security disability benefits for ourselves or our loved one who is disabled.

Many times people who apply for these benefits are denied. When this happens it is advisable to get qualified help to appeal an unfavorable decision. We are fortunate to have **Anderson Marois & Associates**, 2101 5th Avenue North, St. Petersburg, 727-327-0931, available working here in Pinellas County.

This firm is very professional and very experienced in handling disability claims. We also need to be aware that social security reviews disability cases regularly, as often as every two years. When this happens it is possible (even likely) that disability benefits can be terminated. In order to be prepared to address this problem and defend our disability status, we should keep up-to-date records. These records need to include doctor visits, medication, living arrangements, support required for our loved one, as well as their ability to work, handle stress and take care of daily living requirements. When it becomes time for your review by social security you will need these records to help yourself or your loved one succeed in the review process.

Should you be denied benefits in the review process, I advise you to gain help from a professional advisor. This is difficult due to the fact that social security rules prevent advisors or representatives from receiving any payment for their services unless they go through a lengthy application process which makes accepting payment impractical.

Michelle Anderson Marois was kind enough to donate her professional services to assist us in our benefit review appeal process. You may also seek assistance from the legal aid office.

We greatly appreciate the assistance donated to us by Anderson Marois & Associates. Their firm has genuine empathy for our cause. If you are denied social security benefits, I strongly recommend you contact them for assistance or consultation to help you resolve issues.



VA 'STEPS OF LIFE' GETS CIT INFORMATION

NAMI Pinellas County provided information about CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) training to the Bay Pines family and consumer education program, Wednesday February 18th. The program was part of the Steps of Life Psychosocial Rehabilitation Recovery Program. Joe Connelly, one of NAMI's Family-to-Family instructors was the facilitator for the program.

NAMI Board members John & Anne Jones distributed CIT and NAMI brochures and gave an explanation regarding the origin and history of CIT, both in Florida and in Pinellas County. The attendee's were very interested in CIT and appreciative of NAMI and the community efforts to bring the safety and services of CIT to both veterans and civilian citizens.



**"Visit" us in cyberspace.
go to www.nami-pinellas.org**

Dr. John Carnes, left, and Dr. Ajoy Kumar from Bayfront Medical Center shared information about depression at the January education meeting. Dr. Kumar is a member of the NAMI Pinellas Board of Directors.

CONSUMER CORNER

In Memory of Chip Correll

by Stephen Thompson, Co-Chair, Consumer Council

It's that time of year again. The NAMI Consumer Group is planning another Peer-to-Peer Course scheduled from April 18th-June 20th. The course will be taught at the New Beginnings Recovery Center at the Directions for Mental Health Oakwoods Center at 8823 115th Avenue North in Largo. It is accessible by PSTA route 73. The course will run for nine weeks from 1-4 p.m. on Saturdays and is free of charge.

The course teaches consumers about how psychiatric diagnoses are made and some biology of mental disorders, and includes lessons on spirituality, addictions and relationships, among other topics.

The consumer learns about his/her own condition by telling their story and forming a Relapse Prevention Plan. In this plan one "breaks down their illness" and learns skills about how to handle a situation if one thinks they may be getting sick again.

I would recommend the course to any consumer who is interested in learning about their illness or wants to advocate for other consumers. The course is a transformation and will give

the student insight into their illness that they may not have had before.

It is highly recommended that one attend all nine weeks as each week builds on the previous week. Pre-registration and screening is also required.

For more information, or to sign-up, contact me at: 727-443-4715, or sthompson134@tampabay.rr.com. Thank you.

IT'S TIME TO ADVOCATE!

The Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners plan to cut 20% from its overall general fund for the next fiscal year.

Please call or write the Commissioners personally to advocate for consumers with mental illness and substance abuse. Ask them not to cut funding for social services for the homeless and others with mental health and substance abuse diagnoses! A reduction in services could seriously jeopardize their lives!

CHIP CORRELL SCHOLARSHIP AWARDED

The family of **Chip Correll** is pleased to announce that the recipient of the **Chip Correll Memorial Scholarship** is **Tracy Beilfuss**. Chip Correll, who was a NAMI Pinellas consumer member, was an active advocate for the mentally ill and graduated from St. Petersburg College in 1991. In his honor, a memorial scholarship to benefit a St. Petersburg College student with a mental illness has been created.

The College hosted their 10th Annual Scholarship Appreciation Luncheon in February at the Epi Center in Largo. This presented an opportunity for donors and recipients to become acquainted during the event.

Tracy Beilfuss is a bright young woman with a big future ahead. She lives in New Port Richey with her lovely mother, Suzanne. Tracy graduated from SPC in 2007 with an Associates of Science Degree in Office Systems Technology. In 2008 she graduated from SPC with an AA Degree in Arts. Currently she is studying for her BAS in Technology Management degree. In her spare time she enjoys volunteering at Morton Plan Mease-Northbay with over 500 hours being served!!

We all wish her continued success as she follows her dream of completing her education.
By NAMI member Dee Nelson

COLDWELL BANKER AWARDS GRANT FOR PEER-TO-PEER COURSE

NAMI Pinellas County was the fortunate recipient of a generous donation from Coldwell Banker Realty Cares Program. The grant awarded to NAMI Pinellas County is to help off-set expenses in our Peer-to-Peer Program. My wife, Anne, and I were presented the check at Coldwell Bankers office, 3325 66th Street No., St. Petersburg. Anyone needing realty services can contact them at 727-381-2345.

We are very grateful to Margie Lynch, Realty Associate who recommended our organization as well as Arlene Fuino, Associate and Facilitator for the Cares Program, and Carolyn Ives, Manager of Coldwell Banker, St. Petersburg, for the dedication and service to our community. In addition to the grant for NAMI Pinellas County, Coldwell Banker also awarded grants to other non-profits in our community.



Arlene Fuino, left, from Coldwell Banker, presented a donation from the Coldwell Banker Realty Cares program to NAMI Pinellas Board members John & Anne Jones for education classes.

Visit www.nami-pinellas.org for more information about Peer-to-Peer and other education classes.

SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNITY SERVICES

PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE

The Public Defender's Office of Pinellas/Pasco Counties serves citizens with mental illness in many ways:

Mental Health Division, formed in 1999, consists of attorneys, mental health professionals, and support staff dedicated to representing hundreds of clients with mental illness preventing their further involvement in the Criminal Justice System. The unit has placement professionals, therapists, and support staff to provide for the needs of the clients.

Homeless Outreach Program consists of a lawyer and support member networking with local shelters and programs serving the homeless population. Legal advice is aimed at preventing the incarceration of homeless individuals for minor infractions and is run with the cooperation of law enforcement, the state attorney, and the courts.

Misdemeanor "Incompetent to Proceed" Program provides counseling and support for the misdemeanor clients who have been determined by the court to be too ill to proceed to trial on their criminal charges, but would otherwise receive no mental health services.

211 Tampa Bay Cares Gets Achievement Award

Congratulations to **2-1-1 Tampa Bay Cares** on receiving the 2008 Outstanding HMIS Achievement Award for improving Data Quality from the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development. And a big thank you to all the homeless service providers who have worked so hard during the past two years to become active members of the Tampa Bay Information Network (known as TBIN). The great efforts of the local continuum of services made this award possible. Hats off to Micki Thompson, Edward Perry and Jeff Gethring and all other members of the TBIN Team.

A lawsuit against DCF in 2007 was filed on behalf of felony clients who had been adjudged "incompetent to proceed" to trial. That lawsuit involved dozens of clients held unlawfully in jail without the disposition of charges against those clients, disrupting the flow of those cases, imposing huge costs to Pinellas County for the care of those clients during the months their cases were delayed, and providing needless stress to the victims of these cases and only increasing the backlog of those cases in the system. This civil lawsuit resulted in a Court Order against the Secretary of DCF, who ultimately resigned, which contained settlement terms to provide new services benefitting clients.

Last May, Public Defender Bob Dillinger was the guest speaker at the NAMI Pinellas Education Meeting. In September he was the keynote speaker at the Guardian Association-Pinellas County's Expo 2008 where he spoke on mental health issues in the criminal justice system.

Legislators Crist, Galvano, Homan and Dean recognized as 'Champions'

Four Tampa Bay area legislators were named recipients of the **Florida Partners in Crisis "Champion Award"** in 2008. Sen. **Victor Crist**, R-Tampa, Rep. **Ed Homan**, R-Temple Terrace, Rep. **Bill Galvano**, R-Bradenton, and Sen. **Charles Dean Sr.**, R-Inverness were honored by Partners in Crisis for their support of legislation to improve treatment services for Floridians with mental illnesses.

"The award, created in 2007, recognizes those individuals who have been outstanding champions in our fight to solve the current crisis in Florida's mental health and substance abuse system," said Partners Chair **Judge Mark A. Speiser**.

Homan, who is also an orthopedic surgeon, became known for his interest in mental health and substance abuse is-

SUPPORTED HOUSING NOW AVAILABLE

Homeless Emergency Project has openings for transitional housing through the Supported Housing Program (SHP). Requests for placement require documented verification of a disability, proof of low income, proof of employment with income verification, or a Pinellas County Human Services rent voucher. SHP provides homeless and low income individuals the opportunity of a stable residence while making preparations for the future. For all interested applicants or referrals, please contact Zak White, Housing Manager at 727-442-9041 ext. 114 or Gloria Rivera, Case Manager, at ext. 117

Applications can be completed in person Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. at 1120 North Betty Lane, Clearwater, Florida, 33755.

sues early in his legislative career. Crist, who has served as chair of the Senate Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee and vice-chair of the Health Policy committee, played a lead role in the Senate in passage of the 2007 Criminal Justice, Mental Health, & Substance Abuse Reinvestment Act.

Galvano was the House sponsor of a bill to overhaul the provision of forensic mental health services and implement the recommendations of the special Florida Supreme Court committee on mental health. Among his several committee assignments, Galvano has served on the House Health Care Council and Budget and Policy Council. Dean was recognized for his leadership and support of passage of the Reinvestment Act in 2007. *Reprinted by permission of Florida Partners in Crisis*

Consumer Federation Issues Consumer Alert Warns Against Misleading Prescription Drug Switching Practice

TALLAHASSEE- The misleading and potentially dangerous practice known as prescription drug "switching" is becoming more prevalent in Florida, according to a consumer alert issued in December by the Consumer Federation of the Southeast. During the past few months, health insurance plans have been sending letters to their members urging them to switch from brand name medications to so-called "generic alternatives." The Federation wants patients to know *a generic alternative, or "therapeutic substitution" is not the same as a "therapeutic equivalent"*.

"The concept of therapeutic substitution, or 'switching,' can be very confusing for consumers," said Federation director Walter Dartland. "Most people don't understand the terminology and don't realize the insurance companies are encouraging them to switch to a completely different drug that often has a different chemical make up and which can affect their body very differently than the medication they currently use."

Dartland emphasized switching medications for financial gain

is unethical and dangerous - putting patient safety at risk and eroding the doctor/patient relationship. "When it comes to their health," he said, "patients deserve all the facts."

"There are certain drug classes where it may be safe to switch from one drug to another, and there are others where switching can be dangerous - and the person deciding that should be the patient's physician," said Dr. Bruce Rubin, assistant professor of clinical Neurology at the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine. "I do not appreciate HMOs and insurance companies, who are not privy to my patient's medical history, sending letters asking them to switch medications. It undermines the doctor-patient relationship by questioning my credibility as their physician," he added.

Responding to this issue, the Consumer Federation of the Southeast has outlined steps patients can take to protect themselves:

1. Start with your doctor. Discuss your current medication and treatment plans with your doctor. Pay close

attention to the medications you're currently prescribed and keep a written record of what drugs your doctor feels are best for your condition.

2. Check with your insurance company. Since it's possible your insurance company might practice incentive therapeutic substitution with or without obtaining your consent, or that of your doctor, call your insurer and ask.

3. Ask questions. If your insurance plan, pharmacist or doctor wants to switch your medication, ask why, especially if your current prescription appears to be doing its job. It's critical to know if the new medication will achieve better results because there might be unexpected side effects, as well as interactions with other drugs or food. Ask whether you need to take the drug with the same frequency as your current prescription.

4. Appeal. If your insurance company is pushing for a new drug but your physician feels your current prescription is the safest and most effective for you, appeal the insurance company's action. Call your insurance carrier for information on its appeal process.



A recent graduating class from a NAMI-Pinellas Consumer Peer-to-Peer Class. Classes are offered free of charge to participants, coordinated by the Consumer Council, and funded by NAMI events and fundraising efforts.

CIT CELEBRATES 10TH ANNIVERSARY

Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training celebrates its 10th anniversary in June, 2009. Pinellas County was the first in Florida to initiate the Memphis, Tennessee model of training law enforcement officers with 40 hours of information about how to interact with individuals with mental illnesses.

This program has been adopted throughout the country, and the Pinellas County program has grown significantly during the past 10 years, having trained more than 800 local officers and other staff.

Sgt. Thomas Acker coordinates the training for the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office. For more information, call the NAMI helpline at 727-791-3434 or visit us at www.nami-pinellas.org.

The next CIT class will be held June 22nd-26th, 2009

FAMILY-TO-FAMILY CLASS SET FOR MARCH

PLEASE SIGN UP FOR THE NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Pinellas County Family-to-Family Education Program. It will be held every Tuesday evening beginning March 3rd, 2009 at 6:00 p.m. at Dunedin Morton Plant Education Center, 818 Milwaukee Avenue, Dunedin, FL. Pre-registration is required. Classes run through May 19th.

Family-To-Family Education is a free, 12-week course for family caregivers of individuals with severe mental illnesses. The Course is taught by trained Family members. All instruction and course material are free to class participants. More than 125,000 family members have graduated from this national program.

The Course includes:

1. Current information about schizophrenia, major depression, bipolar disorder (manic depression), panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, borderline personality disorder, and co-occurring brain disorders and addictive disorders;
2. Up-to-date information about medications, side effects, and strategies for medication adherence ;
3. Current research related to the biology of brain disorders and the evidence-based, most effective treatments to promote recovery ;
4. Gaining empathy by understanding the subjective, lived experience of a person with mental illness ;
5. Learning in special workshops for problem solving, listening, and communication techniques ;
6. Acquiring strategies for handling crises and relapse;
7. Focusing on care for the caregiver: coping with worry, stress, and emotional overload ;
8. Guidance on locating appropriate supports and services within the community; and
9. Information on advocacy initiatives designed to improve and expand services.

Registration is required. Please call after 6 p.m. for Marianne Martin (727) 443-3140; call the NAMI Help Line at (727) 791-3434; or e-mail: memartin1943@yahoo.com. Please pass along this information to friends, families, co-workers, etc. This is the best course ever!

**NAMI EDUCATION CLASSES ON FREE!
REGISTER TODAY!**

CLERGY AND MENTAL ILLNESS

By Patricia Hall, Board of Directors

Last Fall, I read a troubling article on www.msnb.com which revealed that "in a study of Christian church members who approached their church for help with a personal or family member's diagnosed mental illness, researchers found that more than 32% were told by their pastor that they or their loved one did not really have a mental illness. They were told that the problem was solely spiritual in nature."



What makes this potentially even more destructive is that other studies have found that "clergy, and not psychologists or other mental health experts, are the most common source of help sought in times of psychological distress." The results were published in the journal *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*.

I wish that Lakewood UMC were not so unique, but I am thankful we stand outside of this particular study. The Lakewood Methodist Counseling Center's healing presence is on this campus. Andy Bell (LCSW) provides counseling for not only the congregation but also for the community. We celebrate Counseling Sunday each year (May 17, 2009) and acknowledge that God created us for wholeness. We recognize that wholeness involves the physical, the emotional, and the spiritual. We hope that all who come to Lakewood UMC and the Counseling Center may move toward healing and wholeness.

"A BUNCH OF PEOPLE" PLAN MARCH

By Pat Curtin

The new group "A Bunch of People" is planning a March on March 19, 2009 at the County Courthouse in Clearwater from 10-11:30 a.m. We are united for funding Florida's Mental Health and Substance Programs.

The group is concerned that according to published reports, Florida is 48th per capita in Mental Health Spending, 47th in Medicaid Spending Per Child Beneficiary and 3rd in Number of Prison Inmates.

Our largest Mental Health institutions are jails. Yet, only a small proportion of the violence in our society can be attributed to persons who are mentally ill.

Only 42% of statewide need is met for adults with severe and persistent mental illnesses. Funds taken from the current Mental Health Budget means loss of programs, loss of employment, possibly increased homelessness, incarceration, hospitalization, and death. We are not talking about dollars. We are talking about the lives of people. Without proper funding, access to out-patient care is severely limited. People with ILLNESSES are sent to the streets, the jails, and expensive and unnecessary hospitalization.

IS THIS NECESSARY, OR ACCEPTABLE? IS THIS NOT NEGLECT of SOME of our most VULNERABLE CITIZENS? Cuts mean loss of ESSENTIAL services. We are creating prison beds instead of mental health services. To learn more, contact www.abunchofpeople.vpweb.com.

“STATE JAILS” NO OPTION FOR LOCAL SRT

*Immediately after the Department of Corrections indicated it wants to build “state jails” in local communities to be used for non-violent drug offenders or probation violators, NAMI Pinellas County wrote the following, which was printed in **The St. Petersburg Times** as a Letter to the Editor in 2008.*

Hey, here’s an idea for a new option. Since most jail and prison populations are over-crowded with persons with mental illness, release them to mental health treatment facilities. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that 15% to 50% of those confined suffer from a mental illness! The recovery rate for mental illness is higher than that for cancer, heart problems, etc.

Mental illnesses are not treated by the medical system; they are treated by the criminal justice system. An initial response by the police to long-term “treatment” in a correctional facility is what they can expect.

In Pinellas County, lack of funding just closed the Short-term Residential Treatment facility (SRT) for persons with mental illness. SRT is a much needed piece of the puzzle to recovery for those apparently not so unstable as to require hospitalization, but not stable enough to be released into the community.

Persons with mental illness can look forward to a “locked-down” facility. It just won’t be the SRT; it will be the “State Jail.” What a cruel joke.

The following letter was sent to the Governor last October. It is re-printed here as an example of legislative advocacy for individuals with mental illness.

Dear Governor Crist:

Partners in Crisis has learned through media reports that Florida could eventually receive a significant portion of the \$35.2 million that WellCare Health Plans says it will repay to cover accounting errors in its Florida Medicaid behavioral health contracts. This is money that was earmarked to provide mental health treatment to Floridians—money we believe should be channeled back into the state’s community mental health system.

Our members, who include representatives from the judicial system, law enforcement, treatment providers and families and consumers, see on a daily basis the tragic consequences of an underfunded system of care that for years has failed to meet the mental health services needs of poor and uninsured Floridians. Our legislators will be under pressure in the coming months to make cuts that will undermine this neglected system of care, a move that will only shift costs elsewhere and have a drastic effect on a vulnerable population. During a time of fiscal crisis, we need more than ever to preserve the services that are so essential to the health and safety of our communities.

This unexpected source of funding can be used to not only avert these cuts but also to shore up a neglected system of care. We would argue this is an appropriate use of WellCare’s repayment since the amount is based on capitation payments earmarked for Medicaid mental health services. The money can and should be allocated to the Department of Children & Families to be reinvested in community mental health services as intended by the Legislature.

We urge you to support our position and help assure that these funds are used to provide much needed mental health services for Floridians. Please let us know what action you plan to take on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Judge Mark A. Speiser -- Chair, Florida Partners in Crisis
17th Judicial Circuit -- Ft Lauderdale, Florida



Joan Trahman Memorial Fund

Our many thanks for recent donations made to the Joan Trahman Memorial Fund.

Each time you donate “in honor” of or “in memory” of someone you love, your donation has been added to this fund. Thank you for honoring the special people in your lives with donations in their memory.

When you send NAMI a memorial gift, please be sure to tell us in whose memory you are donating.

NAMI LOSES LEADER

Maureen Todaro, one of NAMI’s pioneer leaders from Pasco County, passed away in January.

Maureen and her husband Carl have devoted their lives in advocating for persons with a mental illness.

Maureen served as President of NAMI Pasco for several terms. Carl is on the NAMI Florida Board and served for many years as the Treasurer for NAMI Pasco. Both of them have attended and participated in NAMI Pinellas End the Mystery events for years.

We extend our deepest sympathy to Carl and the family.

Social Security Benefits Increase for 2009

The 2009 cost-of-living adjustment for Social Security and SSI beneficiaries has increased to 5.8 percent. This adjustment is based on the increase in the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W). As you know, inflation is one of the biggest challenges for people living on a fixed income. The annual COLA ensures the buying power of our beneficiaries remains strong. The increase was effective with December Social Security benefits received in January 2009. SSI recipients saw the increase in payments received on December 31, 2008.

An Open Message from the NAMI National Board of Directors

Among a governing board's most important tasks is ensuring its own succession. With an eye toward building an ever-stronger National board, we want to articulate the experience, skills and expertise we think we need on the National board. We offer these thoughts in hopes that they will prove useful both to those who are considering seeking election and to those who must cast their votes to select our new colleagues.

NAMI Board service demands experience, knowledge, commitment, and time to help others. Board members must be passionate about NAMI's goals, values, and beliefs. But beyond that critical passion, Board members should have some high-level decision-making experience and knowledge in one or more of the following areas: public policy, fund raising, non profit legal oversight, outreach and educational programs, technology and communications, marketing, membership development, business, investments, finance, or volunteerism. Service on the board of a large nonprofit organization and understanding of the complex and varied governance decisions a board struggles with on a routine basis are also critical to good NAMI Board service.

Board members are elected for three year terms and may serve two consecutive terms.

Board members should be prepared to dedicate a between 6 – 10 hours/week to their NAMI Board service, including service on 3 – 4 standing committees, frequent conference calls, other work groups as may be needed, in addition to Board and other meeting travel. NAMI Board members represent the organization before the general public, NAMI members, professional service providers, and public officials.

To know what specific skills and expertise we need on the Board, we first had to know what we already have. In collecting this information we noticed some important things:

- While among us we have a great deal of experience with the law and legal matters as they relate to issues of concern to NAMI, we have only one lawyer.
- While among our most important roles as a governing board is fiscal management, we have very few members with specific training in this area.
- While fund raising is critically important as a board function – and an expectation of us all – we have relatively few members who really relish this role.
- While NAMI represents mental illness across the life span, we have only one member with younger children who live with mental illness now, and just a few whose adult children became ill when very young.
- While NAMI seeks to represent the communities in which we live all across the country, our board still lacks substantial diversity (three African Americans, one Asian American, and no Hispanic members; one gay/bisexual member; just two combat veterans; only three current members under 50; and a general lack of geographic distribution). Although we think we've made great progress in our diversity in recent years, we know we need to do more!

This year, five board members' terms will expire and their

seats come up for general election; two have served ably and with great dedication for two terms and cannot seek re-election; three have served a single term and may or may not seek re-election. Among the assets we will miss when these valued members depart are lived experience as consumers and/or family members of someone with a serious mental illness, ethnic diversity, representation of gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender members, public policy expertise, and professional expertise in psychiatry.

The NAMI National Board is a "working board" whose members play active and important roles in the success of the national organization. NAMI is best served by Board members who are "team players" and who keep the "big picture" in mind. Service on the National Board challenges us all to rise above our local and state concerns, or single areas of particular interest, to see the scope of our national needs. To best serve in the Board role, members are expected to:

- Attend and participate fully in quarterly Board meetings, Annual Conventions, Leadership Institutes, and other organizational functions;
- Understand and protect the fiduciary health of the organization;
- Understand and adhere to the democratic process of a non-profit Board;
- Understand & support NAMI's programs & public policies;
- Be NAMI members in good standing; and
- Make what feels to the individual to be a significant financial contribution to NAMI National, on an annual basis.

The NAMI National bylaws require that a minimum of 75% of the board be comprised of persons who have or have had mental illness, or parents or their relatives. In order to ensure compliance with this requirement, all board candidates and members are asked to identify if they have had a lived experience of serious mental illness, whether as consumer, family member, both, or neither. (Candidates' statements to this effect will be published in the special election mailing, along with their campaign statements.) We currently have two board members who have not identified as family members and/or consumers under this definition. No more than a total of four non-family/consumer members may serve on the board.

Service on the NAMI National board is a fulfilling experience. We are honored and humbled to represent the members who elected us and we want only to do the best job possible for NAMI and its vital mission. We invite able and experienced leaders from all walks of life to join us in this remarkable journey -- and we thank the thousands of NAMI members who inspire and focus us in our work. We encourage those who are considering seeking election to contact us. Thank you for all that you do, every day, to support NAMI!

Sincerely, Your NAMI National Board of Directors

P.S. If you have questions about the election process, please write to us at Governance@nami.org or call Lynn Borton at 703-516-0687.

PICNIC IN THE PARK

Saturday, May 2, 2009

11:00 am - 2:00 pm [Rain or Shine]

Iris Awards will be presented at noon

Anderson Park - Shelters #4 and #5

39699 US Highway 19 N

Tarpon Springs, 34689

PSTA bus transportation available

Free Hamburgers, Hot Dogs, Beverages

RSVP: Call 727-209-0890 by April 24th

or e-mail admin@nami-pinellas-fl.org

Come Join the Fun!

THE IMPACT OF SELF-DISCLOSURE

The Center for Mental Health Services recently released a new monograph entitled "Self-Disclosure and its Impact on People who Receive Mental Health Services." This report examines the power of self-disclosure, the benefits and costs associated with revealing one's mental health problems, and issues of disclosure in employment settings and by mental health providers. Recommendations are offered to further examine this topic and considerations are presented for individuals who are contemplating self-disclosure.

Negative public attitudes regarding mental illnesses are persistent problems individuals face. Research addressing discrimination and prejudice shows that individual's attitudes improve when they have direct contact with persons with mental illnesses, when they can get to know people beyond labels and myths. Such approaches rely on individuals disclosing their past mental health service use.

To download a copy of the report or to order a print version, go to <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/sma08-4337/>

Want information on Federal mental health grants, publications, meetings, policies, programs and other useful material for mental health consumers? Join the CMHS Consumer Affairs Listserv at: <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/listserv/>

Membership and/or Renewal Request Form

Name: _____
(Title) (First) (Last) -or- (Name of Organization)

Street Address: _____ Apt./Unit # _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone # _____ Cell Phone # _____

E-mail address (for special notifications): _____

New Membership: Yes No -OR- Membership Renewal: Yes No

Type of membership (*Please check*):

- Individual (\$40)
- Family (\$50)
- Supporter (\$100)
- Open Door (\$3)
- Student (\$15)
- Corporate-Business (\$250)
- I believe in NAMI's mission and wish to donate \$ _____

Relationship to Consumer (*Please check one if applicable*):

- Parent of Adult Child
- Parent (child under 18)
- Spouse
- Adult Child
- Consumer (Self)
- Sibling or Other Relative
- Friend
- Professional

Reason for joining (*Please check all that apply*):

- Family to Family
- Peer to Peer
- CIT
- Support Group
- Education Programs
- Membership Drive
- Other: _____ (March-April 2009)

Please make checks payable to: **NAMI** Pinellas County, Florida, Inc. and mail to **NAMI** Pinellas County, Florida, Inc., 466 94th Ave. N. St. Petersburg, FL 33702

“HELP US HELP YOU” -- NAMI SURVEY

We continually try to exceed your expectations and provide you with quality education, support and advocacy. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey and return it to NAMI Pinellas County Florida, 466 – 94th Avenue, North, St. Petersburg, FL 33702.

Do you attend our Education Meetings? Yes No
 Ideas for future topics _____

Have you attended Family-to-Family? Yes No
 Have you attended Peer-to-Peer? Yes No
 If yes, rate the classes on a scale of 1-5? _____
 If no, why haven't you? _____

Do you read "The Times" Newsletter? Yes No
 Type of information you prefer: _____

Do you have access to the internet? Yes No
 Would you prefer the newsletter by e-mail? Yes No

Do you visit us at www.nami-pinellas.org? Yes No
 How often? seldom occasionally often

What type of info would you like on the website? _____

Would you like time sensitive info by e-mail? Yes No

e-mail address: _____

Do you attend Family Support Groups? Yes No
 How often? seldom occasionally often

Do you attend "NAMI Connections" Groups? Yes No
 How often? seldom occasionally often

Are you a member of our affiliate? Yes No
 If not, will you please join? Use the membership from on page 11

Do you attend the following events:
 Picnic in the Park in May? Yes No
 Holiday Party in December? Yes No
 Mental Illness Awareness Events? Yes No
 NAMI Fundraisers? Yes No

If no, please tell us why: _____

Have you used our NAMI Help Line? Yes No
 Have you recommended it to others? Yes No

Have you participated in legislative advocacy?
 Called Legislators Visited Legislators
 E-mailed Legislators Written to Legislators
 Presented before Legislative Delegation

How can we advocate for you? _____

If you answered no to any questions, please explain why.

Thank you for taking time to respond to this survey. Be sure to list your e-mail address if interested.

Please share your ideas/comments to help us meet your needs:

NAMI Pinellas County, Florida, Inc.
 466 94th Avenue North
 St. Petersburg, FL 33702

NON-PROFIT
 ORGANIZATION
 U.S. POSTAGE PAID
 ST. PETERSBURG, FL
 PERMIT NO. 608

**NAMI
 MEETINGS SCHEDULE**

Education Meetings
 1st Thursday--7:00 p. m.
 Monthly

Board Meetings
 3rd Thursday--6:00 p.m.
 Monthly

Family Support Groups
 3rd Thursday--7:30 p.m.
 Monthly

**NAMI Connections
 Consumer Support Groups**
 Every Monday, 6:30 p.m.

All meetings are held at
 Hospice of the Florida Suncoast
 5771 Roosevelt Blvd.
 Building 100
 The Gathering Place
 Clearwater, FL 33760

PICNIC IN THE PARK--MAY 2nd