



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

Thursday, May 1st

7:00 pm -NAMI Pinellas Education Meeting
"Mental Health Month",
Guest Speaker: Bob Dillinger, Public Defender

Saturday, May 10th

"Picnic in the Park" and
"NAMI Iris Awards"
11 am to 2 pm,
Anderson Park -- Shelters
4 and 5, Tarpon Springs

Thursday, May 15th

7:30 pm -Family Support
Group Meeting

Thursday, June 5th

7:00 pm -NAMI Pinellas
Education Meeting
"Hurricane Preparedness"
Guest Speaker:
Patricia Elliott from
Suncoast Community
Mental Health Center

Friday, June 6th,

3:00 p.m.
CIT Graduation Ceremony
See page 3 for details.

Friday, June 13th through Monday, June 16th, 2008

NAMI National
Annual Conference
Orlando
See page 6 for details

Thursday, June 19th

7:30 pm -Family Support
Group Meeting

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

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

There's no better month than May to increase awareness about issues surrounding mental health.

May is a nationally acclaimed month so that groups throughout the country can help you become more knowledgeable about mental health issues. We want to guide your focus so that you'll better understand the issues faced ev-ery month by individuals with a mental illness and their families--no matter what the month!

Raising awareness is a tricky thing -- it's difficult to measure our success and it's challenging to decide how to educate you about all the issues of a grave nature, like insurance parity for the mentally ill.

To celebrate the month, we invited **Public Defender Bob Dillinger** to speak at our educational meeting on Thursday,



PUBLIC DEFENDER FEATURED IN MAY

NAMI has invited
Pinellas County
Public Defender **Bob
Dillinger** to speak at
our May Education

session on Thursday, May 1st at 7 p.m.

Mr. Dillinger will discuss initiatives he has brought to the County and his creation of a program that includes Mental Health Counselors in the Public Defender's Office.

The specialists address specific needs of individuals who have made it to jail but could be better served at a local mental health facility or with outpatient services.

May 1st. (See notice below.) He'll address how we can deal with the fact that jails have become "treatment" centers to deal with mental health issues. And then we will party -- to give hundreds of people a chance to picnic together and honor those who have received this year's Iris Awards, given to individuals in Pinellas County who generously have given their time and commitment to help those with mental illness and their families.

We invite all members and their friends or families to join us on Saturday, May 10th in Tarpon Springs for this spring event.

BE PREPARED BE SMART

The Education Meeting on Thursday, June 5th will feature a speaker on Hurricane preparedness.

Patricia Elliott of Suncoast Community Mental Health will discuss how we can be more prepared when there is an emergency. Her message of "BE PREPARED and BE SMART" is one for all of us to consider when getting ready for the Hurricane Season.

All education meetings begin at 7:00 p.m. and are held in Central Pinellas County at The Hospice of the Florida Suncoast.

The NAMI Pinellas County annual
Picnic-in-the-Park and
Iris Awards event is on
Saturday, May 10th. 11 a.m. -2 p.m.
Anderson Park, on U.S. Hwy 19 in
Tarpon Springs at Shelters 4 and 5.
To let us know you're coming, please
call 727-942-8140 by May 1st.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

May is Mental Health Month and NAMI Pinellas County, Florida, is going to celebrate in style!

To kick-off the month, we are proud to announce that Public Defender **Bob Dillinger** will be our guest speaker on Thursday, May 1st for the Education Meeting. What a wonderful way to begin celebrating.

On May 10th, we will have our 12th Annual Picnic in the Park and Iris Award Presentations. Please come join us for this fun-filled (not to mention – belly-filled) event! The Iris Awards will be presented at 12 noon to honor those who have gone “above and beyond” to help improve our mental health community. So come, cheer them on and congratulate them.

The CIT Committee has been working hard preparing for the next CIT class scheduled for June 2-6, 2008. Please come and congratulate the graduates and meet Commissioner John Morroni who will be the Graduation Keynote Speaker. The ceremony will be held on Friday, June 6th at 3 p.m. See **John Jones'** CIT article on page three for more details.

Speaking of graduation, I want to congratulate all the soon-to-be graduates of the Peer to Peer class! Graduation is slated for Saturday, May 3rd, at 1:15 pm and everyone is invited to attend. A special thanks goes out to our Peer to Peer instructors – **Steven Thompson,**



President Judy Turnbaugh

Vicky Holder and Johnny Limbaugh for doing a great job teaching the classes.

If you haven't attended a NAMI National Conference, this would be a wonderful time to go since it will be held this June in Orlando! Be sure to drop by one of Vincent House's two workshops and their display area. Details are available at www.nami.org and also in this newsletter.

The NAMI Pinellas County newly designed website is getting lots of hits thanks to our Webmaster **Rod Atkins**. If you haven't checked it out lately, please do. It is our way of getting out information to you as quickly as possible about events, meetings, etc. See the article on page eight and on nami-pinellas.org. We hope to see you at some of the activities planned for May. Meanwhile, enjoy the Spring and take time to smell the flowers!

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St. Petersburg, FL 33702
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 Board Member Gay Hawk of Windmoor Healthcare. To contribute articles, e-mail to: turnj@aol.com

**BECOME A MEMBER OF
NAMI PINELLAS COUNTY**

Crisis Intervention Team CIT classes set for summer

The Pinellas County Mental Health Coalition and the CIT Committee have scheduled the next CIT class for June 2nd thru 6th, 2008, at the Sunstar EMS Center, 12490 Ulmerton Road, Largo.

About 30 officers from the Clearwater, St. Petersburg, Gulfport, and Pinellas Park police departments, as well as the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office will be trained.

Graduation will be Friday June 6th at 3:00 p.m. and will feature the guest speaker County Commissioner John

Morrone. Guests are invited.

A CIT Dispatcher Training for the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office is scheduled to begin in May. Other agencies will be added soon.

A CIT refresher training course for any previously trained officers from any of the local agencies will be held this summer at USF/Tampa campus. For more information contact John Jones at 727-544-4543.

The next National CIT conference will be held in Atlanta, Georgia, November 4th thru 6th, 2008. Interested parties are encouraged to attend. Contact Pat Strode, CIT Program Administrator for NAMI Georgia, 770-234-9347, or please visit their website at www.namiga.org

EDITOR'S NOTE: Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) is a 40-hour course given at no charge to law enforcement officers who want CIT training. Local mental health providers and advocates provide the training.

CIT IN ACTION:

WHY SPECIAL CRISIS RESPONSE TRAINING WORKS

by John Jones, Past President, NAMI

On Monday, March 31, 2008, at approximately 1:00 p.m., a motorist noticed a man sitting in his vehicle with a handgun on Dunedin Causeway out toward Honeymoon Island. The motorist called 911. Pinellas County Sheriff's Office dispatched CIT officers to respond to the call.

It was determined that the man was a suicide risk. PCSO then dispatched a negotiating team including additional CIT officers. SWAT Team officers were also dispatched to the scene. After seven hours of negotiating, CIT officers and the PCSO psychological coordinator were able to successfully de-escalate the crisis and get the man in crisis to Morton Plant Hospital and then to Personal Enrichment Through Mental Health Services (PEMHS).

We owe a debt of gratitude to the PCSO for their dedication to CIT. This is an example of an excellent resolution to a crisis situation that could have resulted in the loss of lives, including officers, innocent citizens and, of course, the individual in crisis.

Thank you **Sheriff Coats** and the CIT Teams that have prepared our officers to serve our community.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR *St. Petersburg Times*

**By Martha Lenderman,
vice chairwoman, Pinellas
Mental Health Coalition**

The Pinellas Mental Health Coalition, representing 44 local organizations, strongly commends Pinellas County **Sheriff Jim Coats and the entire Pinellas County Sheriff's Office** for its support of the Crisis Intervention Team program. This program has done much to improve officers' ability to interact with persons who have serious mental illnesses, reducing use of force while enhancing officer safety.

The benefits of CIT couldn't have been better illustrated than in the successful efforts recently

by three CIT-trained deputies in intervening with a man threatening suicide on the Dunedin Causeway. The deputies, with their remarkable skill and patience, brought what could otherwise have been a lethal event to a peaceful conclusion. The hours of skilled intervention that day resulted in the man laying down his gun and agreeing to treatment.

While some people, particularly those isolated on Honeymoon Island, were inconvenienced, the safety of the suicidal man, the deputies and bystanders had to be prioritized. Each person affected by this incident would have hoped for the same degree of skill and training for his or her own loved one in the same circumstance.

Sheriff Coats has ensured the safety of all residents of Pinellas County, including persons with mental illnesses. There is no doubt that his foresight in ensuring that hundreds of deputies have participated in the intensive 40-hour CIT training program will continue to produce positive dividends to all Pinellas County residents.

JOIN A VINCENT HOUSE SHOWCASE THIS YEAR

What is a Vincent House Showcase?

Just **IMAGINE** a place where people with a psychiatric diagnosis could participate in a restorative community. Where they could practice work in a work-ordered day.

Just **IMAGINE** what life would be like if everyone living with a mental illness could contribute to society instead of feeling like a burden.

Just **IMAGINE** a place of opportunities, challenges, acceptance, rekindled dreams, a place to feel useful and valued, a place where diverse abilities, beliefs, and cultures are valued.

Just **IMAGINE** a place where people are not defined by their mental illness, but rather by their indomitable spirit and resiliency.

This is Vincent House!

A Vincent House Showcase affords the opportunity for all in the community to tour the Clubhouse, see the work of the units, and meet the founders, several members, and a representative of the Board of Directors. **COME SEE HOW A VISIT TO VINCENT HOUSE CAN BE A LIFE CHANGING EVENT!**

Join a Showcase on the following dates:

Tuesday, May 6th, 2008
5-6 p.m.

Wednesday, May 28th, 2008
10-11 a.m.

Tuesday, June 10th, 2008
5-6 p.m.

Wednesday, June 25th, 2008
10-11 a.m.

Please RSVP:
727-541-0399



Memorial Fund Named in Honor of Joan Trahman

Every time we are at a NAMI event, we tell "Joanie" stories.

Joan Trahman always supported NAMI Pinellas County events, with time, money, attendance, energy and a never ending commitment to the consumers and families we serve.

It is fitting, therefore, that the NAMI Board of Directors has established the "Joan Trahman Memorial Fund."

Each time you donate in honor of or in memory of someone you love, your donation will be added to this fund, which will be used for NAMI's education and support programs for local consumers and families.

When you send NAMI a memorial gift, please be sure to tell us in whose memory you are donating. Also send the name and address of the person who should receive an acknowledgment of your gift.

FAMILY-TO-FAMILY SET FOR FALL

Family-to-Family is a *free* 12-week course for family and friends of individuals with serious mental illness. It is taught by trained NAMI family members. Attendees must attend all 12 classes.

Learn about the signs and symptoms of the illnesses, medications, coping skills and treatment resources available.

Classes are held at The Hospice of the Florida Suncoast, Roosevelt Blvd, Clearwater. For more information call:

NAMI HELP LINE
727-791-3434

To register contact:
Marianne Martin
(727) 443-3149 or e-mail:
memartin1943@yahoo.com



(L-R) Mary Heyliger, Carrie E. Meo-Omens, LCSW, Director of ICON and Patricia Hall at the Student Intern Fair where they staffed the NAMI information booth.

NAMI was represented at a student intern fair this spring coordinated by ICON -- The Florida Institute for Continuing Professional Development, A Social Enterprise of Family Centers, Inc.

CONSUMER CORNER

In Memory of Chip Corell

by **Steven Thompson**, Co-Chair, Consumer Council

We are currently teaching our second NAMI Peer-to-Peer Consumer Education/Relapse Prevention class and only have a few weeks left in this nine week course. Graduation is slated for Saturday, May 3rd, at 2 p.m. and everyone is invited to attend the graduation party at 5771 Roosevelt Blvd., Building 100, Clearwater, FL 33760 (where our regular NAMI Meetings are held). Please RVSP and let us know if you can come.

Our Fall Peer to Peer classes will be held Saturdays beginning August 30th thru October 4, 2008. This class is designed for all consumers who want to learn more about mental illness and techniques to prevent relapse into illness. Please call and register as the classes fill up quickly. They will be held at the same location.

The NAMI Pinellas County Consumer Council is also looking for new members. We meet the fourth Thursday of each month in Largo or Clearwater, depending on availability. We are discussing matters concerning advocacy, outreach and fundraising. We have been up and running for about one year.

The NAMI Florida Consumer Council is another avenue where one may get involved. We have monthly conference calls, on the third Thursday, alternating 2 pm and 7pm. The calls with our new Executive Board, where I am currently 1st Vice Chair, have been meeting since December and are discussing matters concerning Voter Registration, Outreach, Advocacy and updating By-laws.

These are just a few ways a consumer can get involved with NAMI. We also have weekly consumer-run support groups and education meetings where one can learn about services in the local area.

One more thing, NAMI Pinellas County is having our free Annual Picnic-in-the-Park on May 10 from 11 am to 2 p.m. (rain or shine) at Anderson Park, Shelters 4 and 5. Please call and RSVP so we know how much food to prepare. Bus Route 19 stops in front of Anderson Park.

If you would like any more information on any of the above items, you can phone me at (727) 443-4715, or e-mail me at sthompson134@tampabay.rr.com.

NEW MAILING ADDRESS

In case you missed our notice last month, we wanted to remind you we have a new mailing address. Renew your membership or make a donation to:

NAMI Pinellas County, Florida, Inc.
466 94th Ave. N.
St. Petersburg, FL 33702

PEER TO PEER

Peer to Peer is a *free* nine-week course, two hours per week, taught by trained NAMI Consumers to teach other consumers with mental illnesses how to establish and maintain their wellness and recovery.

The next class will be held beginning August 30th. Registration is required by contacting:

Steven Thompson
(727) 443-4715 or e-mail
sthompson134@tampabay.rr.com



Vicky Holder, Vice President of the Consumer Council, recently enjoyed the Florida State Fair when members of the Consumer Council took time off to enjoy a beautiful day of fun and food. To learn how to become active with the Consumer Council, contact the number or e-mail address above.

VINCENT HOUSE GOES NATIONAL

Staff and members of the local ICCD Clubhouse **Vincent House** will be presenting a workshop at the NAMI National Convention in Orlando in June. They also will have an information and display booth. Please join them twice on Monday, June 16th to “Experience the Possibilities”.

8:30-10:30 a.m.

“Moving Out of Poverty: Supported Employment & NAMI-driven Clubhouses”

3:45 – 5:00 p.m.

“The Fountain House Clubhouse Model”



Some of our newest NAMI members participating in a Peer-to-Peer session. OK, we lied. But, you have to admit they are paying close attention to everything that's said and responding as only they know how! Photo by Steven Thompson, of course

There's still time to register for the NAMI National annual conference June 13-16 at the Rosen Centre Hotel in Orlando. SEE ADD BELOW.

MAKE YOUR PLANS NOW FOR NAMI'S 2008 NATIONAL CONVENTION

ROSEN CENTRE HOTEL • ORLANDO, FLORIDA • FRIDAY, JUNE 13 – MONDAY, JUNE 16

IF YOU'VE NEVER ATTENDED A NAMI NATIONAL CONVENTION YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE MISSING. JUST READ WHAT SOME OF LAST YEAR'S ATTENDEES HAD TO SAY ABOUT THEIR CONVENTION EXPERIENCE:

“This conference was extremely motivating and inspirational. It filled me with hope!”

“When I see and hear about the absolutely incredible things that have been accomplished by consumers and family advocates around the country, I leave here inspired to keep up the good fight!”

“It is so lovely to spend time with my NAMI “family” and feel totally myself—not only accepted but embraced. Thanks for the love. We're all in it together!”

DON'T MISS OUT! HOTEL ROOMS RANGING FROM \$72-\$134/ NIGHT ARE AVAILABLE FOR NAMI MEMBERS AT AREA HOTELS. DETAILED PROGRAM, HOTEL AND REGISTRATION INFORMATION IS NOW AVAILABLE ON THE CONVENTION WEB SITE AT WWW.NAMI.ORG/CONVENTION.



NAMI 2008
ORLANDO



DONOR SPONSORS NAMI NEWSLETTER

An "anonymous" individual, on behalf of her family, has donated \$5000 to NAMI Pinellas County to sponsor the production of this newsletter -- The Times. When making this donation, she said their gift "is dedicated to all NAMI members and volunteers."

According to President **Judy Turnbaugh**, "The generosity of this gift impacts our Board tremendously, as this family truly understands the need for education, support and advocacy for those with mental illness." Financial support to publish The Times ensures that our messages reach nearly a thousand people, six times a year. We are extremely grateful for this generous gift," she added.



Crisis Intervention Training is a 40-hour course offered to law enforcement officers to help them better understand how to react when called to a scene that involves the actions of a person with a mental illness. The officers in the photo above graduated from the course last November. CIT is sponsored by NAMI Pinellas County, Florida, and the Mental Health Coalition of Pinellas County.

MAY IS
MENTAL HEALTH
MONTH.
CELEBRATE WITH
THE NAMI PICNIC
MAY 10TH!

KUDOS KORNER

Congratulations to **Judy Turnbaugh** who was honored by Suncoast Community Mental Health at their annual Sunrise Awards Luncheon in February.

Thanks to AstraZeneca for their generous donation of \$1000 to support NAMI's mission.

Guest Speakers at Memphis CIT Annual Awards Dinner

Donald and Judy Turnbaugh had the distinct honor and pleasure of being the guest speakers at the Memphis CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) Annual Awards Dinner on Tuesday, April 22, 2008.

Memphis is the home of the CIT program. It was developed by **Major Sam Cochran**, Memphis Police Department and **Dr. Randolph Dupont**, University of Memphis. Today, CIT training is being provided nationwide and internationally.

Listening to the heroic efforts of the CIT Officers being honored brought tears to the eyes of those attending the event.

No one single program has had such a major impact to the community as CIT. Families and consumers alike are so appreciative to the CIT trained officers, and to all the instructors who teach the 40-hour course.

WEB SITE MOVES TO 21ST CENTURY

An introduction by Gay Hawk, Vice President.....

www.nami-pinellas.org

by Rod Adkins

We are moving on and moving out with the website for NAMI Pinellas County, Florida.

- Some of us are kicking and screaming, as our new webmaster **Rod Adkins**, with a lot of help from his wife, **Martina**, educate us about what a website can do for our organization.
- Some of us are cheering with delight because someone who knows what they are doing is helping us strengthen our website and making it easier to use.
- And, of course, some of us don't even know what a website is!

The Board of Directors is developing guidelines to help us decide what should be included on our website, what links we should incorporate and how we can make the site informational, educational and easy to navigate.

As always, we welcome your ideas and input. So, if you know what you're doing, as far as computers and websites go, give me a call at 727-541-2646, extension 1514 and help the Board structure our message for the 21st century! And, thanks again to **Rod and Martina Adkins** for all their hard work.

SURVEY

AND, SPEAKING OF INPUT.....

Please contact any of the NAMI Pinellas County, Florida Board members (listed on page 2) to give us your ideas. Please think about the following issues, and let us know what **YOU** think. THANKS!

- Do you like the idea of a phone tree, so people can call to remind you about meetings and special events?
- What topics would you like to see featured during our monthly education meetings?
- How would you like to become more involved with NAMI?
- What do you think about a NAMI WALK to help raise funds?
- Why do you think more members do not support our fund raising events?

Hi fellow past, current, and future NAMI members.

- * Did you know that we have our own (NAMI Pinellas County) website?
- * Have you ever visited it? Have you visited it recently?
- * Do you find it useful?
- * Does it say enough?

There's a good chance that you found NAMI through a website. That's what most of us (millions of us) do these days -- Google this and that -- searching for information, low prices, help, answers, directions, and news. Google a keyword and "hey Presto!" you have a page or pages of responses.

In today's world a website is the ideal platform to communicate a message to all those Googlers!

We have our website so let's all get on with the job of conveying the NAMI message. A website **has** to do something -- it can't just sit there. Apart from informing us of meeting schedules, service providers and help lines, it is the vehicle for us to impart our message regarding the treatment and care of persons with brain disorders and banish the stigma.

Most of us involved have strong feelings because we are part of those "1 in 4 people affected," so let's voice our feelings.

I need your input. Whether it's an issue affecting you that needs airing, or an item from the news or a TV program. I can add or link it to our website.

I have made some updates and added some pages and color so please peruse. Also the calendar is active so check out all planned activities.

Send your suggestions directly to our editorial committee at turnj@aol.com

FYI

Please remember to write your legislators regarding issues which affect individuals with brain disorders.

Each Legislator has a website you can visit that contains information not only about them, but also about Bills, assignments, councils and committees and other valuable information.

www.myfloridahouse.gov

Contains information on the Florida House of Representatives.

www.flsenate.gov

Contains information on the Florida Senate.

www.myflorida.com

Contains information on Florida Government overall, for example, the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, and the Judicial Branch.

END THE MYSTERY

Want to help plan our End the Mystery fund-raising events? We would love to have you join the Fund-raising Committee. Got ideas? Call John and Anne Jones 727-544-4543 and they'll put you to work. Bet you can't guess what this year's theme will be! Events will be held in October. Call now to volunteer.

We have lots of things going on and want **YOU** to be a part of all we do. We would appreciate your feedback and suggestions.

A special thanks goes out to **Ashley Johnson**, Ameriprise, for sponsoring an Appreciation Luncheon honoring our Consumer Council. Susan Lang, Chair, NAMI Florida Consumer Council, joined in the celebration where we all talked business!

NAMI MEETS WITH JAIL STAFF

By Judy Turnbaugh

Four members of the NAMI Pinellas Board of Directors — **Richard Durstein, John Jones, Donald Turnbaugh and Judy Turnbaugh** — recently met with staff from the Pinellas County Jail to discuss some issues of concern. **Major Alexis Davis** (commanding officer/jail and detentions), **Janice Hill** (RN and Health Monitor) and **Vicky Scotti** (RN and Program Administrator Inmate Health Care) attended the meeting to discuss the following topics:

■ Admissions-Intake Process

Everyone taken to jail is evaluated by an Intake Nurse with both a verbal interview and observation. Many deny having any medical or mental issues. Unless it is determined they require an evaluation, they are put in the general population. Most deny having mental health issues.

■ Medications

Medications are prescribed by **Dr. Miller**, PCSO Jail Psychiatrist. He determines if a patient requires medication--only he can prescribe them. If patients refuse to take medications, they cannot be forced to take them.

If a person is admitted to jail and is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, medications are not prescribed until the person detoxes.

If a patient comes from the state hospital and is currently on specific medications, the jail will keep them on those meds.

Dr. Miller has the overall responsibility of the patients.

■ Medical Unit vs General Population

Those with medical or mental issues could go to the medical unit; however, not everyone does.

■ Interactions with Mental Health Providers

The jail will attempt to contact organizations providing services and will share medical records with the mental health providers

(e.g., Focused Outreach, Case Managers, FACT, etc.) who visit clients.

■ Interactions with Family Members and Caregivers

The jail follows HIPPA regulations and cannot release information unless a previously signed Release of Information exists authorizing a specific person to receive information.

■ Discharge Procedures

Upon release, individuals get a 3-day supply of meds and a list of local resources. No direct follow-up is provided.

■ What can families do?

Families are encouraged to provide information to the jail. The family liaison is Janice Hill, RN, MPH, LHRM, Health Services Monitor. She can be reached at [727] 464-6415, extension 49372 or by Fax at [727] 464-7984.

Unless there is a Release of Information, they can only listen to what the family has to report. You can provide a 1-2 page summary of the diagnosis, medications (names, dosages, adverse affects). Include the name of the current mental health provider.

Families and friends can phone or visit the jail during visitation hours. Note: the visitations are via a TV screen.

■ Summary

Unfortunately, the jails have become the *defacto* mental health facilities. However, the jail is not a "treatment facility." This is difficult for all of us to accept when we know that our loved ones need treatment while incarcerated.

As family members and advocates, we must continue to pursue appropriate treatment so that our loved ones do not go to jail, live homeless on the streets, etc.

*see Jail Meeting
Continued on page 12*

NAMI MEMBERS ADVOCATE IN ST. PETERSBURG TIMES LETTERS TO THE EDITOR RESPOND TO ISSUES

By Judy Turnbaugh, President

TO: *St. Petersburg Times*, March 28, 2008
RE: "Stabbed boy's mother is bipolar, records show"
Published March 24, 2008

NAMI Pinellas County, Florida

Mental Health Coverage Still Lacking in Florida

By Donald Turnbaugh

At the very time this apparently deranged woman stabbed her son, the Florida legislature was once again going through various machinations over bills (HB-19 & S-164) that would mandate health insurance companies to provide equal coverage for mental disorders as they do for physical illnesses. Although 46 other states have some form of parity, certain Florida legislators choose to believe the scare tactics of the health insurance lobbyists. They ignore study after study showing the increase in cost is marginal, if any.

The real issue here is not cost, but discrimination. Mental illness is one of the few remaining subjects that has escaped the 'protection' of compassion, decency, or even political correctness. Over the past 10 years, no amount of advocacy or education has been able to convince them to support fair legislation.

No one can say that this stabbing would not have happened if the woman had health coverage. Statistically, persons with mental illnesses, who receive proper treatment, have a high level of recovery, higher than many physical illnesses.

Real equality in health insurance will provide benefits far beyond those with these debilitating illnesses. The entire community benefits by gaining working, tax paying citizens who contribute to society instead of consuming the resources in crisis units, ERs, jails, prisons, the courts, and an array of other social services.

Drug research: To test or to tout?

Once again, persons with mental illness are the targets of sensationalism. The opening paragraph begins by talking about "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*." Any time the media wishes to draw attention to persons with mental illness, they depict the most deplorable examples, and referencing that 33-YEAR-OLD MOVIE is a prime example.

Why were atypical antipsychotic medications chosen as the example of fraud and corruption in the pharmaceutical and medical industries? Certainly, the same types of opportunities for abuse exist when prescribing all pharmaceutical medications (e.g., Celebrex, Lunesta, Viagra, etc.).

You only have to turn on the TV, look at magazines, or the newspapers to see advertisements enticing people to try the "new and improved" purple pill, or the sleeping pill with the butterfly, or a couple dancing because their arthritis is much better. The fact that these medications are also paid for by Medicare wasn't sensational enough for this article – so, let's blame it on the poverty level person who suffers from mental illness!

Being a full time advocate and a family member of a person with a serious mental illness, I know first hand the devastation caused when medications are changed and the person begins to have serious problems controlling their illnesses. Often, med changes are made when medications are no longer on the drug formulary — forcing a person who is doing perfectly well to change to yet another medication. Psychotropic medication changes are not like switching from Tylenol to Aleve. It takes weeks to titrate from one medication to another before the replacement medication begins working.

Are there side effects with the new atypicals? Of course! What medications don't have side effects – including weight gain? Diabetes is running rampant everywhere in our society – not just with persons with mental illness. Could one of the problems associated with weight gain in persons with a mental illness be caused because most of them are living at or below poverty level where they cannot afford fresh fruits, vegetables, fish and lean meats? Or, perhaps, it is

Continued on page 11



LETTER TO THE EDITOR *continued from page 10*

because they can't afford private trainers or expensive gym memberships.

If you want a true unbiased research study, ask the persons taking the meds which work best for them – atypical or older generation. Or, ask family members who see first hand what is happening when their loved ones are on ineffective medications. See how their quality of life becomes non-existent!

There are more costs associated than just the cost of atypicals vs. older generation medication. Costs not directly associated with the medications include increased admissions to ER's, Crisis Stabilization Units, the jails, more suicides, and increased law enforcement involvement.

Why don't we give people the proper medication; pass insurance parity; give people a chance to earn a decent living and improve their quality of life? It is criminal to have medications available to help people with their illnesses and then turn around and take them away leaving them even more hopeless.

“Stigma” has been replaced with pure “discrimination” against persons with mental illness!

IS IT TIME TO RENEW YOUR NAMI MEMBERSHIP?

.....Just a reminder to check your address label on the back page of the newsletter to make sure it is the correct mailing address. If not, please let me know so I can correct it. You can e-mail updates to me at ajones27@tampabay.rr.com or call 727-544-4543.

Also check the top right side of the address label to see when your membership expires. If it has expired or will soon, please mail your renewal. This will help reduce the cost of mailing out a reminder.

For your convenience, use the membership form below and make your check payable to NAMI Pinellas County, Florida, Inc. and mail to our new address:

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

Thank you. *Anne Jones, Membership Chair*

Become a Member of NAMI Pinellas Today!

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

Address: _____
(Street Address) Apt./Unit # _____

(City) (State) (Zip Code)

Phone [____] _____ E-mail: _____

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: _____ (May-June 2008)

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

PARTNERS IN CRISIS--FOCUS ON COLLABORATION

Last issue we featured a spotlight on Florida Partners in Crisis whose mission promotes state and community collaboration across the mental health, substance abuse and criminal justice systems. NAMI Pinellas County, Florida is proud to be a member of this unique statewide organization that focuses on four areas:

- **Education** activities designed to foster awareness of mental illnesses and/or substance use disorders and the needs for an improved system of care. This is accomplished through the distribution of reports, surveys, statistics and data to lawmakers, policy makers, key community leaders and the general public.
- **Advocacy** activities revolve around community and state forums, press conferences, media contact, testimonies and distribution of literature.
- **Technical Assistance** activities include assisting communities in building effective community collaborations for strategic system changes and assisting communities in the development and implementation of Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT).

- **Best Practice Summits/Conferences** activities are designed to bring communities together to share and exchange knowledge and information about best practice programs and initiatives around effective jail diversion, court intervention and re-entry.

JAIL MEETING *Continued from page 9*

To advocate, I urge all of you to use your strength and energies by contacting your legislators and requesting adequate funding (they hold the money) for mental health services. The upcoming budget cuts in social services are going to make it more and more difficult to receive treatment and medications. Please write, email or call your legislators and advise them of your personal stories and what happens when a person with a mental illness is not treated.



The scales of justice seem a little tilted for those who go to jail instead of treatment. Public Defender Bob Dillinger will discuss this issue at our next Education Meeting on May 1st. See article on page 1.

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.

NAMI Connections

Consumer Support Groups
Every Tuesday at 1:30 p.m. at
Directions for Mental Health
8823 115th Avenue
Largo, FL 33773

All meetings are held at
Hospice of the Florida Suncoast
5771 Roosevelt Blvd. -- Building 100
The Gathering Place
Clearwater, FL 33760
(unless otherwise indicated)

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

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MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH MONTH !