

**To: Distribution list    January 31, 2015**

## ***NAMI Schenectady E-News for February 2015***

Folks: This is second in a series of monthly newsletters that we are sending to members and friends of NAMI Schenectady. It reports on items of local and statewide interest and events this month that involve our group. Contact is Roy Neville (377-2619) [rneville@nycap.rr.com](mailto:rneville@nycap.rr.com). You can respond to me or to the NAMI Schenectady address: [namischenectady@gmail.com](mailto:namischenectady@gmail.com).

**NAMI Schenectady has its next lunch meeting on Friday, Feb. 6** at noon at the Van Dyck Restaurant, 237 Union St., Schenectady. As usual we pre-order lunches consisting of sandwiches and salad, coffee and tea, and ask you to pay our treasurer, Cindy Seacord, at the lunch. It's \$15 including tax and tip. We would like you to call Roy Neville (377-2619) or Flora Ramonowski (372-6771) beforehand so we can tell the Van Dyck how many are coming. We will have Jason Planck, an advocate for the disabled, with us as guest speaker. Jason is an attorney who regularly attends meetings of the Schenectady City Council and county legislature and speaks on behalf of mentally and physically disabled persons. He will tell us some of the key issues he advocates for with our local governments. We're in the dining room to the right as you enter the restaurant. Park in the lot at the corner of Union St. and Erie Blvd.

**Relatives support groups remain active**—Psychiatric social worker Kevin Moran runs the relatives support and education group every Wed night at 6 pm in classroom B-3 inside Ellis Hospital. This is a counseling session in which each individual or family has a chance to discuss their situation coping with a family member who has a serious adult mental illness. You don't have to have someone treated in Ellis Hospital to attend nor do you have to be a Schenectady County resident. Call Kevin on 243-4255 if you are new to the program. Park in the hospital garage. A second free counseling session is offered by social worker Frank Greco at the CDPC Franklin Street clinic at 440 Franklin St. on Monday evenings at 5:30 whenever there is demand. Call Frank on 374-3403 at the clinic. He also heads family support at the CDPC hospital in Albany every other Thursday evening. Call 447-9611 ext-4512.

**Join us for Advocacy in the NYS Legislature in Albany Feb. 10**--NAMI-NYS holds its annual winter conference on Tuesday, Feb. 10 in Albany, an advocacy day for members and supporters to come to Albany and meet with our home-grown state legislators in their offices. The conference day is listed as 9 am to 3 pm but the program is from 12 to 1:30 in the Albany Room off the Empire State Concourse (at entry to Legislative Office Bldg). The program consists of a free buffet lunch, awards and speakers including the state mental health commissioner Dr. Ann Marie Sullivan. It's worth going to—we meet others coming in from all over the state who make the trek to the conference.

Our Schenectady team has set up visits with three of our area lawmakers. We see Assemblyman Phil Steck in his office in the Legislative Office Bldg, Room 819 at 11:30. We then attend the noon program. We see Sen. Hugh Farley in his office in the LOB, Room 711 at 1:30 pm. and Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara in Room 833 of the LOB at 2 pm. Please join us for the visits. Call Roy if you're coming. We have one car so far so some of us can drive together. We should get our signals straight beforehand for the main points we wish to convey to our audience. We'll send you an agenda by email with the information.

It's best if we go in to see our legislators together, whether we drive together or not. Parking is a bit of a hassle. The Times-Union Arena garage fills up early as do the lots under the Empire State Mall and surface lots on Madison Ave. There is a paid garage in the Tower building on Washington Ave opposite the AE Smith Bldg. and some on-street parking can be found. If you miss the chance to join us this time, consider other ways to contact the legislators soon by phone, email, fax, letter or a face to face visit. You can meet them in their local office by phoning for an appointment. It's important that our voice is heard on the state budget items, now the focus of attention, and later

on various bills. The key topics include the way behavioral health programs will come under privately managed care arrangements this year and next; closing down state hospital beds and transitioning beds over to the community side, more dollars for treatment slots and for homeless, reentry and underserved populations; also staff pay increases, and the minimum wage debates are among other issues. Give a call if you need help with phone no's, office addresses, etc. (Roy, 377-2619).

**NAMI NYS issues action agenda on the governor's budget**—(see NAMI NYS E-News Jan. 16 and Jan. 30 on its website [naminy.org](http://naminy.org)). NAMI NYS puts spotlight on housing in its agenda for the Legislative Conference Feb. 10, making additional beds and supportive staff its top priority. A release states that “safe and affordable housing programs which incorporate recovery oriented support services are the cornerstone of successful recovery from a mental illness within the community setting.” NAMI NYS phone is 462-2000.

**NYAPRS “first look” at the budget**--NYAPRS (New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, based in Albany) provides broader look at the governor's budget Jan. 21 (see [harveyr@nyaprs.org](mailto:harveyr@nyaprs.org) or [brianag@nyaprs.org](mailto:brianag@nyaprs.org)). Housing is cited as essential to mental health recovery--its major theme for advocacy this year. They also discuss criminal justice issues, community reinvestment, managed care readiness, a cost of living adjustment, the Community First Choice program, creating an Office for Community Living and a targeted investment program for not for profit agencies to compete for. NYAPRS has scheduled a legislative day Feb. 25 at the Capitol from 9:30 to 4 with speakers, lunch and breakfast, and rally. NYAPRS phone is 436-0008.

**Ellis Hospital Mental Health Clinic waiting times**—(reported by Tracy Jones, (LCSW-R) intake coordinator at the Ellis Hospital Mental Health Clinic): A new patient at the Ellis Mental Health Clinic will usually see one of our psychiatrists or a nurse practitioner within approximately one month of starting an intake with a social worker. If a non-patient presents at the Ellis Mental Health Clinic without an appointment and requests to be seen urgently, accommodations will be made for the individual to be seen by a social worker that same day. Any time our staff meet with a new patient we attempt to link the patient to the most appropriate services to meet their needs. In urgent cases a psychiatrist appointment can sometimes be scheduled same day or within a week.

**Q.: What services does the clinic offer to older adults?** (Tracy Jones)--The Ellis Mental Health Clinic provides mental health services to adults age 18 and older. We have counselors and psychiatrists with experience working with adults through their lifespan and we have a commitment to serving our community throughout adulthood. In addition to medication management and individual counseling, Ellis currently offers a group, Aging Well, which offers psychotherapy and support to older adults currently in treatment at this clinic. If someone in the community is an older adult, family member, or caregiver of an older adult and does not know where to go or how to start addressing changing health needs we would recommend that they contact their primary care physician. Primary care physicians can assess for underlying medical conditions and may refer their patients to a specialist, for example a neurologist if dementia or other cognitive changes are noted. Care Central continues to be a valuable resource to link older adults in our community with physicians and/or programs to support their needs. The Eddy has a number of programs available to support older adults physical, mental, and emotional health in the home or through day programming. Catholic Charities can assist with transportation, choosing health plans, Meals on Wheels, and other supports for older adults. In some cases Adult Protective Services may also be a needed resource to advocate for and support older adults in our community. When an older adult can no longer reside safely in their home there are a number of Assisted Living Facilities within Schenectady County.

**Criminal justice matters in governor's budget** (Reported by Bob Corliss)--On December 29, 2014, Governor Cuomo signed into law the Prisoners Mental Health Discharge and Planning Act of 2014. This legislation requires OMH staff assigned to state correctional facilities to go further than ever before in putting together a meaningful discharge plan for all inmates released from correctional custody who had been receiving mental health services while incarcerated.

The legislation was sponsored by Assemblyman Daniel O'Donnell and Senator Catherine Young. As a follow-up to this legislation, Governor Cuomo proposed some \$22 million in new community-based initiatives which will support discharge planning and post-release services. Included in this will be funds for additional in-prison assessments, treatment for high risk inmates in state psychiatric hospitals as well as in Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) programs, and supported housing and related services. In the past, discharge planning services tended to be hit or miss. Some inmates lucked out, and others were overlooked altogether.

Among other proposals by Governor Cuomo was one which raises the age of criminal responsibility from 16 to 18 for all but the gravest crimes. While this initiative does not specifically address persons with a mental illness, we know too well the hardships many youths with a mental illness face in the state correctional system. In October of last year a young man from the Albany area who was convicted and sentenced to state prison at age 17 took his life after repeated incidents in which he was abused by other inmates and harassed by officers. Such proposal also would bring New York State law into line with virtually all other states. As of today only New York and North Carolina use the age of 16 as the age of criminal responsibility.

Left out of the governor's budget message was any proposal regarding the expansion and development of police department mental health Crisis Intervention Teams (CITs). Last year, the Legislature added \$400,000 to the budget to expand CITs, or EDPRTs as the Schenectady PD program and others are referred to in the state. While there was no follow-up to this legislative initiative by the governor, NAMI-NYS and other mental health advocacy groups are expected to push for a continuation of state support for this very valuable program.

**No openings for homeless at Schenectady YMCA**—Schenectady YMCA director Lou Magliocca reports that they have a backlog of people looking for rooms at the new Broadway residence and a waiting list of 52 including 11 veterans. It will be some time before we can take people from the community, Lou said. We give preference to veterans, homeless veterans of Schenectady County. We can only take those with disabilities—with mental illness or alcohol and drug problems. The YMCA refers those coming to the door to the City Mission and county Department of Social Services which provides emergency housing. There is very little turnover among the men living at the Y because the new studio apartments are so superior to the rooms at the former residence at 13 State St.

In a surprise the YMCA held a ribbon cutting Jan. 16 with the CEO of the NYS Division of Homes and Community Renewal, Daryl Towns, and Capital District YMCA exec director David Brown present to mark the opening of its new Broadway building. The ribbon cutting was a little late since all 155 residents were already moved into the Y last June 28 to fill all the apartments. But the lateness is forgiven—the converted Broadway factory building has become a major addition to the housing available to people recovering from mental illness and other disability or drug addiction in our county and is managed capably by the YMCA staff.

**Mohawk Opportunities moves clients to HUD Section 8**—Some residents in supported apartments run by Mohawk Opportunities in Schenectady are being shifted to the federal HUD Section 8 program at the urging of their supervisors. They stay in their Mohawk apartments and thus don't know whether they're a Mohawk client or Section 8 client. Joe Gallagher, Mohawk's exec director, said 16 clients, nearly all in state-paid supported apartments, volunteered to be moved to Section 8 recently and many were accepted after their needs were assessed for support services. Both programs are alike in that the client pays up to 30 percent of his or her income towards rent and utilities and the government pays the rest. But Section 8 doesn't pay for case management while the state plan provides for a housing coordinator to visit the client once every four weeks. Gallagher has arranged for some clients to retain this assistance even after shifting to Section 8. And those going to Section 8 can still enjoy Mohawk's social activities, trips and events. The program opens up more beds for his agency so it can accept new clients.

**Short wait list**--Joe Gallagher said Mohawk has had several vacancies filled recently in move-outs in his supported apartments, with a wait list of 15 to 20. Treatment apartments have no wait list currently, he added.

**Social club proposal waits for fund raising scoop**—Plan to open a consumer-run psychosocial club by Howie Vinick, a former consumer-staffer at the Ellis Collage clubhouse and PROS program, now hangs on the outcome of a scheduled fund raiser on the international site Kickstarter. Howie says if this is successful in a month or so he will turn to the next step--to sign a lease for a building to house the club being eyed on Van Vranken Ave. Work would then begin on renovations. Howie spoke to audience of parents and fellow consumers Jan. 15 at the library to explain the project. He encourages others to talk it up and spread the word.

**RSS blocked on housing proposal for Route 7 area**—Colonie Town board suddenly voted Jan. 22 to pull approval for a planned development district on Route 7 in the town that Rehabilitation Support Services of Altamont wanted to build housing for the elderly, low-wage workers and the disabled. RSS said it wanted to use the zoning for a project previously approved in 2007 on the property at 179 Troy-Schenectady Road that had never been built. RSS has planned to develop a mixed-use 128-unit apartment complex with 50 units for the disabled and mentally ill and 20 for seniors and already has commitments from the state to go ahead. But the town board decided to yank the zoning permit just as RSS was making its proposal for the affordable housing project, which some see as smacking of discrimination against a project aimed at bringing in low income mentally ill people.

**Phone scam?** Two of our relatives with Verizon low-priced Lifeline phones are being penalized for not recertifying them Jan.1. What's with Verizon and the other phone companies clamping down on people with mental disabilities who didn't recertify their phones at the six-months' interval--January 1 in this case? The phone companies' requirement caught these two by surprise. Instead of paying roughly \$13 a month for a moderately used Lifeline phone, they are being charged the full amount (\$59 and \$45 a month until they recertify), which they have to pay off in two months. We wonder how many others are caught in this net. You can qualify for a Lifeline phone by being on Medicaid, food stamps, SSI or Section 8 housing. Contact [www.fcc.gov/lifeline](http://www.fcc.gov/lifeline).

**State Justice Center sued over refusal to hand over records** (from Times-Union Jan. 10)—Albany-based Disability Rights NY, a federally designated protection and advocacy group that watches out for the welfare of the disabled, sued the state Justice Center in federal court Jan. 9 over what it says is the center's refusal to hand over records. Justice Center serves as a clearinghouse for complaints about abuse and neglect of people in state care or in facilities licensed by the state. In its suit, Disability Rights says it has been unable to get complete documentation on cases of abuse and neglect and cites instances when records of various clients have been delayed or heavily edited. Formerly called Disability Advocates, Inc., it took the state to court over failure to move disabled people in distressed adult homes in NYC to apartments in the community, claiming this violated the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Olmstead court decision. The governor has reluctantly put funds in next year's budget to move many of them.

**Rep. Paul Tonko calls on both sides to "Move Forward on Mental Health"**—In an article he wrote for The Hill, a Congressional newsletter, Jan. 26, Paul urged advocates in both parties now divided over the Murphy bill and a bill Paul co-sponsored for the Democrats to strive for consensus on reforming mental health policies. He said "There is a sustainable solution for our mental health system that will only emerge when frank discussion and tough choices allow us to find a lasting consensus among all parties." Citing the controversies and the impasse over the lack of services for the mentally ill to date, Rep. Tonko said he "looks forward to doing the necessary hard work with my colleagues to build this better tomorrow." There's no indication the two sides are together at this point.

**Membership dues**--NAMI membership coordinator Cindy Seacord reminds people that dues are due on your annual renewal date. Call her on 847-4961 (cell) or Roy if uncertain of expiration date. We have 43 paid members as of Jan. 25 plus 16 whose memberships have lapsed in the last year. Dues are \$35/year with \$10 going to national, \$3 to NAMI NYS and \$22 to NAMI Schenectady. **Q.: Are NAMI membership dues (\$35) tax deductible?** Under the IRS rules, the portion of dues that come to NAMI national, NAMI NYS and our chapter are fully tax deductible. Neither national nor NAMI NYS nor NAMI Schenectady offers a tangible good or benefit of more than token value.