

To: Distribution list January 6, 2015

NAMI Schenectady E-News for January 2015

Folks: This is first in a series of short newsletters that we plan to send each month to members and friends of Schenectady NAMI. It will report items of interest and notify you of events coming up to keep you in touch.

The former eight-page NAMI E-News newsletter isn't being published any longer, as we mentioned in our December issue. This new message will be a roundup of news events with occasional short articles and commentary. We'd like to hear your ideas about it.

Local items--First, no regular meetings are scheduled for NAMI Schenectady in January. We will resume with our lunch meetings in February. The Wed. evening relatives support and education meetings inside Ellis Hospital run by counselor Kevin Moran resume at 6 o'clock Jan. 7 and every Wednesday night thereafter. Call Kevin ahead (243-4255) if you are new to the group. You don't need to be a Schenectady resident or have had a family member as a patient at Ellis to take part. Meetings are held in the Psych wing, room B-3, with signs on the wall to direct you. Park in either hospital garage and proceed by elevator to the third floor of the B-wing.

Another source of family support is conducted by counselor Frank Greco at the CDPC Franklin St. clinic, 426 Franklin St. on Monday evenings. Call first on 374-3403. Frank also runs family support at the CDPC hospital in Albany on alternate Thursday nights (447-9611 x-4512).

For consumer meetings, pls see website of the peer group, schenectadypeer.com, for listing of their events. (see also new social club forming, below)

New from county office--Community Services Board director Darin Samaha told us the county has a state grant to hire a coordinator to work with jail inmates identified as having a mental illness. Bob Elwell has been hired for this position. He will see they get meds, see a doctor when needed, etc. Darin also said he is in touch with the GAINS Center in Delmar to bring a speaker here to conduct a public forum on trauma informed care as related to mental illness.

NAMI holiday party honored three--December was party month: We celebrated three guests at our holiday party at Turf Tavern, Scotia Thursday, Dec. 18: Kevin Moran, psychiatric social worker at Ellis, for close to 20 years' service leading the weekly meetings of the family support and education group; Patty Goscinski, manager of the Cara Club back in the 1970s, the first consumer drop in club, and long time volunteer for Ellis Collage consumer social club, Ellis PROS and the inpatient units in Psychiatry and for the elderly at Ellis (she still serves at the last two). And Brian Kilcullen, chief of Police in Schenectady, who played a large hand in getting the Crisis Intervention Training program for police officers off the ground last spring. Brian said he is in touch with Eric Weaver, the former Rochester police commander, about leading a one-day training course for the rest of the department (called mental health First Aid). That might happen in May.

On Dec. 18 Mohawk Opportunities ran its Christmas party at the Baptist church, serving dinner to a large crowd. PROS offered an open house to its members at its facility adjoining the Ellis mental health clinic. And parents at Kevin Moran's group threw a party with a cake for Kevin on the 17th.

New social club forming--Howie Vinick, who has served on staff at the Collage consumer club and with PROS, has announced a blockbuster--he is starting up a psychiatric drop-in club for mental health consumers. He's done the spadework--found a building to suit on Van Vranken Avenue, has talked it up with associates, gotten legal and financial advice, has a consultant service helping, claims he can get meal reimbursement and he's ready to move. Howie planned to first announce it Jan. 5 to members of the peer organization and some news outlets. He expects to hold a public meeting in the McChesney Room of the Schenectady main library on Thursday, Jan 15 at 6:30 pm to tell more folks. Families are encouraged to come. He calls it Phoenix social club--risen from the ashes of the departed Collage social club of a few years ago. There will be some serious activities for members plus he says the club will offer lunch and dinner, movie night, pool table and foosball table, karaoke, board games, dominoes, cards and more. The building will need interior modifications which will take time. Consumers will staff it. How might families help? He said he needs donated household items like pots and pans, plates and kitchen appliances. He'll pick them up. Get more info at the meeting.

Shown with Gov. Mario Cuomo--Flora Ramonowski appears in photo on front page of January 3 Daily Gazette with her two young children, part of a group of family advocates surrounding NYS Governor Mario Cuomo as he signs a mental health bill in the mid-1990s. Flora is also quoted in the reporter's story. Mario Cuomo died this New Year's Day.

Ellis closes ER at St. Clare's campus--We're trying to assess the meaning of Ellis Hospital closing its emergency room at its St. Clare's campus on McClellan St. It did this by edict Dec. 1, suddenly announcing all those patients to McClellan St. will now go to the Nott St campus where it hasn't yet opened its new \$60 million ER (attached parking garage just opened). Now the trouble is, all the poor people in the lower half of the city walk in or are bused or taxied into the McClellan St campus, nearer to them than the Ellis Nott St hospital. That's on the northern edge of the city, it's a longer ride and not thought of as their neighborhood. This may come as a big blow for many people who depend on walking into the McClellan St. site but I don't hear a squawk because nobody speaks for this group. Mentally ill people use the dental clinic at former St. Clare's; I think they will still go there. Otherwise those on public pay who are non-emergency needing treatment at Ellis proper will likely be sent to the Hometown Health Center on State St., the big federally qualified health center that's already overloaded. There will be worse crowding, longer waits and less careful svc, you can bet. Can you imagine coughing and sniffing kids and angry moms with nauseous stomachs mixed in with the regular patients at Hometown Health, like our sons, who already get physical checkups there?

Teaming up--Ellis and St. Peter's Health Partners are teaming up once again to launch a new physicians practice designed to fight the region's growing incidence of diabetes, the Daily Gazette reports in Dec. The two hospitals already are joining to form a new regional alliance for health and

mental health care, with some services to be provided at Ellis Health Center's Cushing building on McClellan St. and at Sunnyview Rehab Hospital.

Got the blues this time of year? Schenectady area ministers had suggestions (Gazette Dec. 14) for those dealing with a mental health crisis or loss. It can be a difficult time, said Rev. James McDonald, pastor at St. Stephens Episcopal Church. A few kind words from their pastor can be helpful, but they may not be enough. "I don't want to diminish the impact of spiritual work that can bring healing into people's lives," said Bruce Newman, pastor of Grace Chapel of Clifton Park. "But I also have no problem in referring people to professionals."

The Rev. Lawrence Ross of First Presbyterian Church of Schenectady said combining spiritual and physical care makes sense. "We start in-house, but we look at the spiritual dimensions of a mental health issue, and if it can be helped by medication, that's fine," he said. "But even when we go to institutional care, we maintain contact with the person. We don't think of a mental health professional as a substitute but as someone working in cooperation with us and we prefer working with a mental health professional who understands that and is happy to work with a pastor." Meanwhile, Bob Luidens, pastor at Altamont Reformed Church, remarked: "Whenever my instincts tell me that the person I'm dealing with may be in need of mental health intervention, I refer them immediately, rather than engage in any kind of diagnosis of my own." And at the St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish on Upper Union Street, the Rev. Robert Longobucco says that most Catholics he knows are on board with the benefits of using a mental health professional."

Statewide news

Proposals flying here and there--It's all about money

On Dec. 2 the NY Post reported a "Medi-scare" saying "President Obama's executive order on immigration could sock NY taxpayers with a \$2 billion Medicaid bill by encouraging 300,000 undocumented residents to apply for free government health care. State senators called on the feds to pump more money into Medicaid so NY wouldn't have to foot the entire bill for the non-citizens. But the new more conservative Congress is expected to call for cutbacks in Medicaid spending to the states. And here's a piece Dec. 3 from Crain's Health Plus reporting that NY hospitals, nursing homes and other providers are pushing for \$1 billion in additional funding for the new Capital Restructuring Financing Program. They need the money so mental health providers can upgrade facilities to meet the DSRIP requirements. That's the state's much-ballyhooed new system for delivery of Medicaid services to go into effect this year.

Do you go along with this endless escalation of costs and spending? Really no one is calling a halt. And we don't want the mental health programs "cash starved" as one story puts it. We just want this put in proportion—put the skids on gently instead of always escalating.

A hospital without overnight beds--A NY Times news story Nov. 7 was about Montefiore's (NYC) new hospital center in the Bronx—it gets rid of patients in a day. It advertises: "Look, Mom, no patients in our hospital." That's a terrible joke when you think of all the people with serious mental illness in crisis along with med-surg patients and others who need more than a rest stop. And it must be very costly to move people in and out in rapid fashion. That doesn't solve anything.

Jail reform--Then there's the story about NYC Mayor Bill DiBlasio going to put millions into mental health treatment to reduce numbers of psychiatric patients in the inmate population in Rikers Island jail. That will take more hospital beds, won't it? And the cutbacks are working against that. The story in the Post mentioned Dorothea Dix fought to close the jails in the city and elsewhere in the 1800s to instead open hospital beds for people with mental illness. Dorothy—where are you?

Medicaid reform too confusing-- The state is finding out the shift to Medicaid managed care and all the other schemes like DSRIP and Health Homes and balanced funding are too confusing for the program people—those who run mental health housing and treatment services--no matter how many webinars they crank out. It's all uncannily confusing. Why do those in the field put up with this?

Tiny houses--A Syracuse nonprofit group has proposed building townhouses for the homeless that would cost less than \$14,000 each. Why so cheap? In part, it's because the houses would be tiny. Each house would be 12 feet wide and 14 feet long—about the size of a garden shed, and would have a single living room/kitchen, a bathroom and a sleeping loft. Altogether it's about the size of a master bedroom in other people's houses. Guess who they'll chuck in here.

Prisoner reentry bill signed--NAMI NYS praises the advocacy efforts of NAMI families for legislation the governor signed Dec. 30: S7818/A10071, the Prisoners Mental Health Discharge and Planning bill. It provides Medicaid services for reentry of prisoners to community housing and mental health programs. Nice going, folks.

Advocacy—the NY Health Act would give control to doctors, patients

State Assemblyman and long time health committee chair Dick Gottfried sounds off against the health care and insurance industries in a Times-Union article Dec. 18. Gottfried writes: “Practically everyone is fed up with the current system. Employers, especially small businesses, spend billions for health benefits instead of paying employees more or investing in expansion. Health care providers waste countless hours and resources navigating multiple health insurance bureaucracies to get paid. Insured New Yorkers struggle to keep up with changing plans and providers, rejected claims, and ever-increasing costs. And over 1.5 million New Yorkers still don't have coverage, even after the Affordable Care Act and New York's exchange helped 900,000 New Yorkers get private insurance or Medicaid.

“There really should be a better way—and there is,” Gottfried tells us. “A bill in Albany—the NY Health Act--would create truly universal coverage, cutting health insurers out of the equation and saving the average New York family thousands of dollars while making sure everyone has access to the care they need.” Gottfried urges us to vote for it. Pls contact your state assembly members and senators—they're easy to contact if you look them up on the web. The 2015 legislative session has begun and this is a good time to call, write or stop in to see our representatives. The issue of not enough mental health housing in our community is always appropriate. Tell it in personal terms--how it affects your loved one, if you can.

Roy Neville (377-2619) is writer-editor for this issue. We'll mail this to members without e-mail)

