

NAMI Schenectady E-News

Ides of March 2021 Edition

Acting Editor*: Cynthia Seacord Send address changes, requests to discontinue and comments to: namischenectady@gmail.com
or contact temporary acting editor at 518-374-8071 (home #)

*** Please NOTE: We need one or two members to take on the editorship of this newsletter!**

Support Group Meetings

We are sorry to report that the Ellis Hospital Mental Health Department, which had resumed its weekly Family Support Group in September, then put another pause into place due to the upsurge in COVID-19 cases in our community, is still not able to hold family support group meetings. When a resumption takes place, we will let our friends and members know via e-mail, and expect that Joel Haynes, facilitator, will contact individuals who had been coming to the group.



Virtual Support Through NAMI Capital Region

Our friends at NAMI Capital Region have been able to successfully run on-line family and peer support groups. Pass on the word to your friends and loved ones who have missed going to support groups, whether it be for peer recovery or family support. Here is how you can take part in these groups that meet “virtually” using ZOOM.

Attend a ZOOM* meeting via NAMI Capital Region by logging into <https://namicapitalregionny.org>.

On their home page go to the upper right hand corner and look for a white block containing in light blue the words “ONLINE SUPPORT GROUPS”. Underneath, you’ll see

[Click here for online Support Groups](#)

If you put your cursor on the “Click here...” message and click, it will take you to the Support Group page. Currently there are two groups that are being offered. You will need to link up to the meeting on the right day of the week and time

listed, at about 10-15 minutes prior to the start times noted. Follow Zoom prompts. The two support groups offered are:



NAMI Family Support Group is a support group for family members, caregivers and loved ones of individuals living with mental illness. Share with others and gain insight from others facing similar circumstances. No Registration is required. ***This group meets Thursday evenings with a start time of 5:30 pm.***



NAMI’s Connection Recovery Support Group is a peer recovery support group for adults living with mental illness. People attending learn from each others’ experiences, share coping strategies, and offer each other encouragement and understanding. Groups are confidential, open, and free of charge. No registration required. ***This group meets Mondays beginning at 11 am.***

For either “virtual” meeting, you get on-line instructions on how to connect to the Zoom meetings by PC or cell phone.

*You need ZOOM in order to connect.

NOTE: You or your family member does not have to be receiving care through Ellis Hospital or be a member of NAMI to attend these support groups.

New Board of Directors Elected for 2-Year Term

In January NAMI Schenectady held its first virtual meeting. This was our annual meeting with its most important agenda item being to elect our board of directors, to sit for 2021-2022. Ballots and invitations to the virtual annual meeting were mailed out at least 2 weeks prior to the event in order to give all members adequate notice, in accordance with our by-laws. Electronic ballots were made available to all with computer access, with the exception of those persons who requested paper ballots as well as those members without access to the Internet. At the meeting no others were nominated for board of director positions, neither from the floor nor via ballot submissions. Electronically cast votes were tabulated, and paper ballots secured from the PO Box were opened and their results were tallied. We're pleased to note that over 50% of the membership took part in the election. Unanimously those voting approved the following slate of individuals as board of directors for the next two years: returning members Cindy Sood, Cynthia Seacord, Ann Ashley, Art Collins and Kevin McCormick and new members Anne Marie Heim and Amy Kahn.

Board meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month from 7-8 pm. We will announce when meetings resume "face to face."

Up-Coming Meetings and Programs

Cindy Sood is Board President, Cynthia Seacord is Treasurer, and Amy Kahn will serve as Secretary. We are working on the position of Vice President and assigning people to standing committees.

Guests to our board meetings are welcome! Please contact us (see newsletter heading for our e-mail address) in order to be sent a Zoom invitation to the next meeting, set for April 8th 7-8 pm. Be sure you have the ZOOM application/program on your device!

Resumption of "topic" meetings will be announced once we determine when, where and how we will conduct them.

NY Project Hope Coping with COVID



Feeling overwhelmed about COVID-19?
Help is waiting for you.

NEW YORK STATE
COVID-19 EMOTIONAL SUPPORT HELPLINE:
1-844-863-9314
8 AM - 10 PM, 7 days a week

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced a new helpline for people who are experiencing overwhelming anxiety, stress and depression brought on by the coronavirus emergency.
Call now for free and confidential support.



NAMI
National Alliance on Mental Illness
New York State
is here for you!

Call our temporary Helpline number
518-248-7634
Open M-F from 8 am - 4 pm ET

Visit NAMINYS.ORG
Email info@naminys.org
and contact your local NAMI Affiliate.

NAMI-NYS provides **free mental health** support, education, advocacy, and public awareness.

@NAMI_NYS
 @NAMINEWYORKSTATE
 @NAMINEWYORK #NOTALONE

NAMI Helpline:
1-800-950-NAMI (6264)
Open M-F from 10 am - 6pm ET
Text: "NAMI" to 741-741
Open 24/7

Other Helpful COVID-19 Resources from OMH

- **Tips for Mental Wellness** – check out <https://omh.ny.gov/omhweb/guidance/covid-19-managing-stress-anxiety.pdf>
- **Mental Health Resources During an Emergency** – knowing the signs of anxiety and getting help: https://omh.ny.gov/omhweb/disaster/resources/pandemic_influenza/



9-8-8: A Major Step Forward

We announced back in September that Congress passed S. 2661, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act of 2020. It was signed into law and the new three-digit number becomes operational in July 2022.

More than half of people in the U.S. report that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their mental health. With the passage of the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act, the country is on track to make 9-8-8 fully operational to provide resources to meet the increasing demand for mental health services.

It is vital that we encourage our legislators on federal and state levels to put funding into this project, so that the necessary infrastructures and systems are in place by if not before July 2022.

OTHER ADVOCACY NEWS is on the final 3 pages.



FOR NOW....Keep this important crisis number handy! It might save a life of someone you know

NAMI Offers COVID-19 Related Info

Both NAMI-NYS and NAMI on the national level offer a great deal of current information related to COVID-19 on their websites. Go to naminy.org and click on NAMI New York State's COVID-19 Information link. For NAMI's national helpline and information, go to www.nami.org.



*Want to be part of activities in May related to **Mental Health Awareness Month**? Contact us. Leave us a message at 518-374-8071 or via g-mail (below).*

#ACT4MENTALHEALTH



NAMI Schenectady works only with the help of our committed volunteers. WE WANT YOU!

- Have you missed getting our E-News? We need dedicated members to step up and produce it...writers, editors, etc. Writers can review a book or movie, advocate, or share recovery and wellness-related tips. Will train.
- We need someone willing to serve as a co-webmaster for namischenectady.org, our website Put your technology know-how to work today.
- Offer to serve on one or more of our committees (e.g. programing, finance, support, membership, marketing, social events)

Contact us at: namischenectady@gmail.com

BOOK REVIEWS

Noah's Schizophrenia: A Mother's Search for Truth, a memoir by Kartar Diamond, comes highly recommended. As reported this winter in the *NAMI Syracuse Newsletter*, Dr. Robert Paul Liberman, M.D., distinguished Professor of Psychiatry at UCLA's School of Medicine, says this book will prove helpful to family members who face problems similar to the book's author in finding appropriate treatment and residential care for their mentally ill relative, with its constructive descriptions of the experiences many parents struggle with in trying to cope with someone whose life has been undermined and marginalized by schizophrenia. Shelley S. Hoffman, a NAMI Family Support Facilitator and Family to Family Instructor in California, suggested that this book be required reading for both experienced mental health professionals and those considering a career in the helping profession. Mary and Elin Widdifield, authors of a book concerning the mental health narratives told by parents found Diamond's book compelling. They found that Diamond's authentic mother's voice demonstrated an indefatigable spirit as she sought evidence-based information, researched the legal system, and never lost hope that she could find solutions that would help her son.

Have you read a good book or seen a compelling movie or short TV series that may help others learn more about mental health? We welcome you to share your recommendations in our E-News in upcoming issues.

Two Winter Reads – Two Great Personal Stories

There are a number of people, including celebrities, who have courageously stepped up to relate their own personal experiences with mental illness, its treatment, and recovery, hoping to help others to be inspired by and learn from what they've lived through. Two of my winter reads were books written with this goal in mind. The first was a book published in 2015 by best-selling writer Matt Haig. His very personal, short and thoroughly readable book, *Reasons to Stay Alive*, could easily be read in one sitting, but people may also wish to read it a chapter at a time, and then pause, and take some

time to savor the wisdom and insights it provides. This is a book with heart, and probably should be read by everyone who struggles with or knows someone who has experienced depression. Haig's prose really captures what it feels like to suffer from depression, and his story offers comfort, hope and encouragement to those who are working through what he has experienced. This book can, in my estimation, help any reader work through "surviving life." Others who have reviewed Haig's powerful book have indicated it might do even more, like save some lives.

Another book well worth reading was written by a mom, Sonja Wasden, with the help of her grown daughter, Rachael Siddoway, *An Impossible Life: The Inspiring True Story of a Woman's Struggle from Within*, published in 2019. (The authors refer to their book as "Part I", indicating that they intend to share more of their experiences and insights in a sequel.) The book's title is telling; it will be difficult for some to read because it is so raw and honest. For many years, the main character denied that she was ill, while her life became increasingly bizarre and difficult for her family to watch and endure. You feel for her, and you feel for her family; it's difficult to put this book down. While some parts are difficult to read, you know from the beginning that Sonja does not remain "stuck." She finally gets help, begins to make progress, and is able to have a life that is productive and full; her life does indeed become possible. This book is her gift not only to her family, but to others torn apart by mental illness. Mental illness, like any major illness, impacts family as well as the person who is ill. The reader will gain a great deal of understanding not only about mental illness but also an appreciation for the journey so many make towards a better life, not only for themselves but for their families. You learn the journey is fraught with uncertainty, and steps back as well as forward. *Cynthia Seacord*



Make Our Voices Heard Campaign – NAMI’s February Legislative Advocacy Campaign

Early last March, NAMI Schenectady members went to Albany to meet with some of our state legislators to advocate for a number of programs and actions deemed vital for the improvement in the quality of life of our loved ones living with mental illness. Legislative Day 2020 took place literally just days before life as we knew it came to a screeching halt. By the end of that same week, COVID 19 had reached pandemic proportions, forcing the closure of schools and businesses, requiring the wearing of masks, and ushering in the challenging era of “social distancing.”

A year has gone by. There’s now hope on the horizon as effective vaccines are disseminated throughout the country and administered to prevent this dreaded disease. People wait, impatiently at times, to resume their lives. However, this lengthy pause did not mean that we all went into hibernation. This pandemic challenged everyone and made many realize how fragile our mental health is. Some of us, given our own personal experiences, did not need a pandemic to tell us this. That is why, working behind the scenes, mental health advocates, including many members of NAMI, continued to advocate for many of the very same programs and changes that were talked about in March 2020. This pandemic made mental health more visible, and the needs for reform all the more urgent. It is obvious that, as the 2021 NAMI Legislative Advocacy Campaign slogan has suggested, folks, there is **NO RECOVERY WITHOUT MENTAL HEALTH.**

NAMI New York State leaders thought outside the box during this pandemic to ensure that NAMI folks were still able to meet with legislators this winter to plead for the many mental health initiatives that are even more necessary now, in order to ensure that recovery works. NAMI knew that this year, with the increased need for mental health services and the state budget issues due to the pandemic, it was *critically* important that our state legislators hear our voices. So, rather than trying to manage the multiple simultaneous meetings that would have been required for a single day’s lobbying activity, NAMI-NYS spread out meetings between NAMI advocates and legislators over a period of six weeks. Each week the legislators and NAMI members from a different region in the state were brought together to talk. Matt Shapiro of NAMI-NYS did an incredible job arranging these “virtual” meetings. NAMI Schenectady was involved during the week of Feb. 22-26, when, as it turned out, Matt was able to arrange a meeting with only one of five of our region’s legislators, Senator James Tedisco of the 49th senatorial district.

Matt Shapiro was present to facilitate, and in addition to Amy Kahn and myself from NAMI Schenectady, several NAMI Capital Region members and NAMI-NYS board members also sat in. While the Senator was not able to meet with us personally, he arranged for us to speak with his aide. Our virtual meeting with him lasted over a half hour, much longer than we had counted on. Our meeting with Tedisco was fortuitous, because the Senator, besides being a long-term NAMI Schenectady friend, is a ranking member of the Mental Health Committee. Each of us got a chance to speak, and we managed to cover most of the talking points outlined on NAMI New York State’s agenda and fact sheets. NAMI advocacy materials were left at all legislative offices, and we assume also at the office of Governor Cuomo.

We have included a summary of **NAMI New York State’s 2021 Legislative Action Agenda** in our *E-News* on the next page. We are sure that you have your own stories that can be connected to some if not most of the causes being supported by this **Agenda**. It is our hope, dear readers, that you will **write to our representatives** in the State Senate and Assembly and convey to them how important it is that they **act for mental health** to ensure that New York’s recovery from COVID includes adequate funding for the many mental health services, already stretched, that are needed as we pick up the pieces after this pandemic. *Absolutely vital* is that there be relief for the Behavioral Health Providers in New York, currently struggling with a 20% withhold in funding at a time when there is increased demand for services. Page 7 provides contact information on the legislators who serve parts of Schenectady County and the surrounding Capital Region. **Won’t you please take a few minutes to write to your senator and assemblyperson to advocate for mental health?**



This page summarizes NAMI's 2021 Legislative Action Agenda, the talking points given to legislators during NAMI-NYS's Legislative Action Weeks.

Theme: No Recovery Without Mental Health – courtesy of NAMI NYS

Restore Funding to Behavioral Health Providers: At a time when New Yorkers are seeking behavioral health services at an all-time high rate we need to ensure we have the services to meet this increasing demand. The 20% withholds to community providers have already had a devastating impact on the ability to deliver these critical life-saving services. We must avoid a 5% cut to the behavioral health sector.

- To avert program closures, and reductions in service availability, the State must immediately provide full funding for mental health services and restore the 5% across the board (ATB) cut imposed on providers in the SFY 2021-22 Executive Budget.
- We must ensure that we are maximizing every dollar that is supporting the system. The SFY 2022 Executive Budget proposes the \$22 million in savings due to closures but prevents the re-investment of any savings into behavioral health community-based services. Behavioral Health advocates urge the Legislature to seek inclusion of any savings toward reinvestment in behavioral health community-based services and oppose the language to "freeze" the Community Re-investment Act.
- NAMI-NYS supports minimum wage increase for the behavioral health workforce.

Ensure Access to Appropriate Services and Medication: Access to mental health services and appropriate medications is more important than ever. As the demand for mental health services is at an all-time high, we must be able to meet the demand, this is why NAMI-NYS is advocating to advance Governor Cuomo's effort to expand telehealth services. We must also fully utilize our mental health responders by allowing Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHCs) to diagnose and have their services reimbursed by Medicaid. Address suicide by passing Nicole's Law and creating a 988 system which meets NAMI recommendations.

- Advance Governor Cuomo's efforts to expand telehealth services to all New Yorkers.
- Ensure prescriber prevails language for Medicaid services in final budget.
- Support Nicole's Law: Which addresses suicide by reforming hospital practices.
- Support Legislation: Which would grant LMHCs and LCs the ability to diagnose.
- Support Legislation: Allowing pharmacies to administer injectable medications.
- Support "Provider-Prevails" Legislation: Which prohibits insurance providers from using "fail-first" and "step-up" procedures for psychiatric medication.
- Create a 988 System that adheres to NAMI's Model Bill for Core State Behavioral Health Crisis Services Systems.
- Continue to fund the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer-to-Peer program and expand it to more counties.
- NAMI-NYS is calling for investments in the following programs all of which are necessary for adequate community care: Housing, Assertive Community Treatment Teams (ACT Teams), Mobile Intervention Teams, Respite Centers, and Crisis Centers.

Improve the Criminal Justice - Mental Illness Interface: There has been increased attention for police and criminal justice reform. What is not being discussed is that more than 60% of those incarcerated have a diagnosable mental illness. We must do better to divert people with mental illness from jails and into treatment as well as improve interactions between police and people with mental illness.

- Reinstatement of the funding for the Institute for Police, Mental Health and Community Collaboration to implement Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) across the state. There is \$400k from the SFY 2019-20 that still have not been allocated to the Institute and the SFY 2020-21 had no funding for the Institute. We must re-fund this critical program.
- Support A.227115.2836 the "HALT Bill" which caps the amount of time someone serves in solitary, and ensure people with mental illness and other at risk populations are not placed in solitary. **UPDATE: THE HALT BILL HAS BEEN PASSED BY THE LEGISLATURE AND NOW AWAITS SIGNATURE BY THE GOVERNOR!!!**

For more information on any of the above points, contact Matthew Shapiro at Matthew@naminys.org.

Legislators Serving Parts of Schenectady and Adjacent Counties in the New York State Assembly and Senate



Mary Beth Walsh serves Assembly District 112 which contains parts of the counties of Saratoga and Schenectady. She is a ranking minority member of the Education committee, and also services on the following committees: Ethics and Guidance, Judiciary, Libraries and Education Technology and Mental Health.

Assemblywoman Walsh's e-mail address is : walshm@nyassembly.gov

Her mailing address is: Legislative Office Building Room # 635
Albany, New York 12248



Phil Steck serves Assembly District 110 which is made up of the eastern tip of Schenectady County and the northeastern tip of Albany County. He is a member of a number of committees, including the following: Health, Insurance, Transportation, Judiciary, Labor and Oversight and Investigations.

Assemblyman Steck's e-mail address is: SteckP@nyassembly.gov

His mailing address is: Legislative Office Building Room # 627
Albany, New York 12248



Angelo Santabarbara serves Assembly District 111 which includes Montgomery County and parts of Albany and Schenectady counties. He chairs the Autism Spectrum Disorder Subcom-mittee and the Rural Resources Committee, and serves on the Agriculture, Energy, Mental Health, Government Employees, Racing & Wagering and Veterans' Affairs committees.

Assemblyman Santabarbara's e-mail address is: SantabarbaraA@nyassembly.gov

His mailing address is: Legislative Office Building Room #654, Albany, NY 12248



James Tedisco, serves the 49th Senate District, covering Hamilton and Fulton and parts of Saratoga, Schenectady and Herkimer counties. A member of the Bank, Finance, New York City Education, Consumer Protection and Commerce, Economic Development & Small Business committees, he is a ranking member of the Mental Health and Education committees.

Senator Tedisco's e-mail address is: tedisco@nysenate.gov

His mailing address is: Legislative Office Building Room # 515, Albany, New York 12247



Michelle Hinchey serves the 46th Senate District stretching from Poughkeepsie north into Albany and Schenectady counties and west along the Mohawk Valley in the direction of Fort Plain. The chair of the Agriculture Committee, the senator is also a member of the following committees: Alcoholism and Substance Abuse , Local Government, Energy and Telecommunications, Environmental Conservation, Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks & Recreation, and Commerce, Economic Development & Small Business.

Senator Hinchey's e-mail address is : Hinchey@nysenate.gov

Her mailing address is: Legislative Office Building Room #902, Albany, New York 12247

JOIN NAMI SCHENECTADY

Membership in NAMI Schenectady also makes you a member in
NAMI New York State and national NAMI

To join choose your annual membership dues type(x) below and
complete form to accompany your check: ___ individual \$40
___ Household \$60 ___ Open Door \$5 (limited
income)

___ Donation Total enclosed: _____

Name(s)

Street Address or PO Box

City, State & Zip

Phone _____

e-mail address _____

NAMI Schenectady is a 501(c)3 organization.

**Make your check payable to: NAMI Schenectady,
PO Box 974, Schenectady, New York 12301**

**NAMI Schenectady
PO Box 974
Schenectady, New York 12301**