

Photo Gallery on page 7



PO Box 974, Schenectady, New York 12301

## NAMI Schenectady E-News

Summer 2022 issue

Acting Editor\*: Cynthia Seacord Send address changes, requests to discontinue and comments to: [namischeneactady@gmail.com](mailto:namischeneactady@gmail.com)  
or leave a brief message at #518-986-9114

\* NOTE: We need writers and co-editors for this newsletter!

### NAMI Schenectady Happenings

As summer is on the horizon, it's time to take a look at what's been happening in our affiliate.

We have been holding **monthly board meetings**, usually the second Thursday of each month, at the Swanker Room of the central Schenectady County Library at Clinton and Liberty Streets, from 6:15-7:45. Sometimes the room is unavailable; in May our meeting was held outside the library at the Harriett Tubman/William Seward statue. Despite occasional street noise, this worked! During the summer we plan to hold our meetings in the Swanker Room, but have moved them to the third Thursday of the month through August. Masks are optional in the library but we want people to feel comfortable. If a meeting is held outdoors we will make masks optional. Most attendees meeting indoors prefer that we wear masks. See our calendar for the meeting dates. All are welcome!

In addition to several **C.R.E.A.T.E. Studio** peer activities held during the winter on Saturday afternoons, we participated in several **Earth Day** events in April. One group met at Vale Park off Nott Terrace to clean-up the front part of the park. This yielded about 20 bags of trash, and some recyclables. Some of our crew tilled beds near the park's entrance and planted sunflower seeds. With a little luck, seeds planted there and up along a fence at the CDPC Schenectady Community Support Center on State Street will yield beautiful sunflowers by mid-summer! A second group went to Lock 7 in Niskayuna and created a lovely garden at the entry to the bike path. See the photo on page 7!

For **Mental Health Awareness Month**, four of us got together to make NAMI bows out of special

wide ribbon. The white, gold and blue bows were put up in prominent places including the bike path, libraries, C.R.E.A.T.E., shops and places of worship.

NAMI Schenectady provided information tables at two different events during **Mental Health Awareness Month** in May. Cynthia and Art were at Central Park on May 14 for the local Spina Bifida Association's "Walk and Roll" event, while Amy, Eric, Linda and Ann handed out pamphlets and met with visitors at their table under the community tent set up for Niska-Day on May 21st. On June 10<sup>th</sup> Cynthia joined Amanda and an intern from NAMI NYS at the Schenectady H.E.A.R.T. event at Jerry Burrell Park to hand out mental health information.

**Summer Social Activities Planned for Peers in Recovery:** Art Collins plans to lead peers on several hiking experiences during this summer. These will be easy hikes; we need people to sign up with Art in advance so that we can plan for enough drivers to transport hikers to and from the hiking location. In addition to hikes, we are inviting peers to attend Howlin' at the Moon concerts held during the warmer months at the Mabee Farm. The dates correspond closely to the "full moon." Peers who are interested in going to the Mabee Farm events need to sign up with us so that we cover the \$7 fee for each peer attending. **(For our calendar and more details on how to sign up, see page 2.)**

NAMI Schenectady's "**Wellness Walkers**" team will participate early this October in the American Foundation on Suicide Prevention's Out of the Darkness Walk at Schenectady's Central Park. Contact Cindy Sood, team captain, via e-mail for more information and to join the team.

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# 988: MORE THAN A NUMBER

Announcing 988, the new, three-digit number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL). 988 will be available nation-wide on **July 16, 2022**. Until then, you should call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255) if you or someone you know is in crisis.

988 is more than just an easy-to-remember number. It is a direct connection to caring support for anyone in mental health distress. This may include:

- thoughts of suicide
- substance use crisis
- emotional distress

988 is a free service available to everyone. You can contact 988 by chat, text, or phone. Get support in Spanish by pressing 2. Interpretation services are available in over 150 languages. More to come before the start date, 7/16.



## About Our Warm Line

Last year, using part of a generous donation received from the Hannaford supermarket chain, NAMI Schenectady put into service its own dedicated cell phone number. Our phone is a “warm” line that operates **weekdays from 9-5**. We hope it will help persons NOT on the Internet to contact us. Grass-roots volunteers take turns each month answering the phone. Our phone is mobile, and we can return voice mail messages. “Robo-calls” will be screened out. **Callers, be sure to speak clearly and leave us a call-back name and number.**

**518-986-9114**

**Monday-Friday 9am – 5 pm**

We will try to return phone calls as soon as possible. Let us emphasize that someone experiencing an **emergency** should contact either 911, or another hotline number, several of which are posted on this page. Use 988, once implemented on July 16, 2022, if in a mental health emergency.



**NY Project Hope**  
Coping with COVID

New York's free and confidential COVID-19  
**Emotional Support Helpline**

8am - 10pm / 7 Days

**1-844-863-9314**

[www.NYProjectHope.org](http://www.NYProjectHope.org)

A program of the NYS Office of Mental Health | Funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency

**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](http://NAMINYS.ORG)  
Email [info@naminys.org](mailto: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

**9-8-8 MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS LINE**

**MORE THAN A NUMBER**

**A GATEWAY TO HELP, HOPE & HEALING**

Starting July 16, 2022 Call 9-8-8 Instead of 9-1-1  
During Mental Health Crisis Situations and Receive a Mental Health Response to a Mental Health Crisis

NAMI Family Support Group is a support group for family members, caregivers and loved ones of individuals living with mental illness. Gain insight from the challenges and successes of others facing similar circumstances. No pre-registration is required. Walk-ins are welcome. The groups listed below are run under the auspices of our friends at NAMI Capital Region NY.

**Family Support Group, IN-PERSON: Saratoga**

At Healing Springs, 125 High Rock Avenue 105A (entrance off back parking lot @ blue awning) Saratoga Springs, NY 12866, every first Monday of the month, 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm

**Family Support Group, IN-PERSON: Albany:**

At the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 420 New Scotland Ave. Albany NY 12208, every 1st and 3rd Wednesday, from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm

**Family Support Group, ONLINE (Zoom):**

Go to website [www.namicapitalregionny.org](http://www.namicapitalregionny.org) some 10-15 minutes before the 5:30 p.m. Thursday night meeting. On the home page, click on: **Click here for online Support Group**. Then, scroll down & follow instructions following: **Family Support Group**. Click as directed to enter meeting. To use your phone to join, 929-205-6099 Meeting ID: 830 6082 3068.



A NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group: is a recovery support group for adults living with mental illness. People learn from each other's lived experience, share coping strategies, and offer each other encouragement and understanding. Groups are confidential, open, and free of charge. Walk-ins are welcome; no pre-registration is required.

Find "Peer Support: ONLINE:" on the support group webpage of NAMI Capital Region and you'll see:

*"Click Here By 11:00 Am Mondays To Join Our Online Connections Support Group: To Phone Into The Meeting: Dial 929-205-6099 Meeting ID: 873 9943 949.*

**For other virtual NAMI support groups running throughout the state, visit [naminy.org](http://naminy.org), NAMI New York State's website.**

**Great Ideas for Cultivating Happiness**

**Especially During Times of Stress**

*Based on tips shared by Four Winds Hospital, Saratoga*

- **Be active** – go for a walk, read, watch a movie or participate in a sport
- **Volunteer** – offer time, talent and/or treasure to help somebody else in need
- **Surprise someone** – by doing something kind and thoughtful for them.
- **Make a connection** - reach out and spend time with a person you don't see every day.
- **Focus on the positive** – watch a funny movie or show, or listen to soothing, upbeat music
- **Redirect your thoughts** - step away from the stress. Do a puzzle, play a game, play an instrument, sing a song, take a nature walk
- **Take a break** – leave stress behind by launching a day dream, taking a nap, or enjoying a soothing bubble bath
- **Change perspective** – be calm and try to view things from another angle.

**Above all else, be kind to yourself.**

**NAMI Schenectady SUMMER Calendar**



**Board Meetings:** 6/23, 7/21 and 8/18 at the Swanker Room, Central Schenectady Public Library, arrive at 6 pm 6:15-7:45pm. All are welcome. Masks desired.

**Peer Hiking:** Contact Art Collins 518-372-0960 for info or to register. Meet other hikers at Central Library Lot before 12:30 pm on the following dates for three planned hikes: 6/18 (rain date 6/19) Great Flats Aquifer/Nature Preserve 7/24 – Pine Bush Preserve, Colonie 8/21 – Lisha Kill Preserve/Forest – Niskayuna area

**Howlin' at the Moon:** Peers, reserve a seat no later than day before summer 7-9 pm concerts on 7/14, 8/11&9/15. Call 518-986-9114. Held at Mabee Farm. Route 5S.



**Save this date!!!**



NAMI New York State has announced its return to an in-person education conference this year! Stay tuned for more information. In the past NAMI Schenectady has provided scholarships to attendees who are unable to afford the cost and have not otherwise qualified for a NAMI NYS scholarship to this event.

### **Advocacy Update – Abridged Version of NAMI – NYS’s Legislative Report 2022**

NAMI-NYS is pleased with the New York State budget and the positive impact NAMI advocacy has had this year. The state has fully funded the 988 Crisis Line that goes into effect in mid-July. Its implementation is ongoing. The state has designated \$30 million this year and \$60 million for next year to cover the cost of the crisis response call centers. The NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH) has also received funding to support services that supplement the 988 call centers, including crisis stabilization centers in the community and Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams for youth, so that children can be treated in a familiar home environment whenever possible rather than at an inpatient facility.

New York also provided for a 5.4% COLA for human service provider organizations and mental health providers who care for our folks. This COLA and bonuses for mental health care workers will also help keep current employees in the field and assist in the recruitment of those newly entering the mental health field. NAMI-NYS believes that these increases will enhance the quality of services and care for our communities.

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NAMI-NYS notes that several bills our members have fought for during the legislative session have progressed. Both the Senate and Assembly passed the Mental Health Access bill (A3276) that prohibits the use of “fail first” and step therapy protocols by insurance companies. A3840/S4870 that would allow pharmacists to administer Long Acting Injectable (LAI) medications also passed both houses but only after several compromises were made regarding the bill parameters. This bill will ensure that people receive better access to the life-saving medications they need for their mental health conditions. The Legislature also passed 2 bills related to maternal mental health that NAMI supported. With all of these bills ready to go to the Governor’s desk, NAMI will work with her office to advocate for the signing of this legislation.

Unfortunately, several of our advocacy initiatives around criminal justice reform have stalled in committee. The Clean Slate bill, which would seal the records of certain criminal convictions after a set period of time with no further incidents and the expansion of specialty courts are both still in committees. The Legislature is still working on amending language and provisions for Daniel’s Law which addresses mental health crisis response. NAMI will advocate for the reintroduction of these bills at the next legislative session.

Advocates within the NAMI-NYS Government Affairs Committee are working on a two-year legislative plan aimed at introduction of a package of bills designed to improve mental health access for all New Yorkers. NAMI NYS will be working closely with the NAMI affiliate leaders around the state and its legislative partners to bring these initiatives to fruition, and will update us on its progress.

### **MOHAWK OPPORTUNITIES to Answer Your Questions at Our September Topic Meeting**

Members of the Mohawk Opportunities staff have accepted our invitation for them to come and speak to our membership about what is new with their organization, and to answer your questions. This will happen at our first topic meeting since COVID made face to face meetings difficult if not impossible. As soon as we have secured a date, time and space we will announce it. We’ll be interested in learning more about their momentary move of peers from Curry House into a brand-new renovated house on Union Street.

## **Best-Selling Author Matt Haig, a Peer in Recovery, Incorporates Mental Health in Novels and in His Very Personal Non-Fiction**

My interest in the British journalist and author, Matt Haig stems from an on-line posting in praise of his writing from my favorite contemporary actress, Catriona Balch, of *Outlander* fame. Her strong recommendation of Haig's books urged me to find out more about him. I started off by reading his book of non-fiction, **Reasons to Stay Alive**, a fortuitous choice, for it became immediately obvious that this book was written by someone with compelling lived experience to share with his readers on the subjects of mental illness and suicide (and surviving it). If you are either a friend or family member of someone living with mental illness, Haig's book will clue you in as to what it is like to live with severe anxiety and depression. If you are a peer in recovery, you're going to find that Haig, as a peer, is also someone who has found his way, and wants to share his insights with you. Only recently, I've started reading Haig's most recent book, also non-fiction, that picks up where **Reasons** leaves off. You can use his **The Comfort Book**, published in 2021, to find comfort and direction along the lines of the very best in daily affirmations literature.

It was only after reading **Reasons to Stay Alive** and perusing the best-sellers listings in the local *Sunday Gazette* that I became interested in having a look at Haig's fiction. I discovered that not only does he write for adults, but also for children. It is said that his novels are quirky, maybe even "dark." After reading his most recent best-selling novel, **The Midnight Library**, I decided his writing is of the sci-fi/fantasy genre, and had no qualms in passing the book along to my spouse whose favorite reads are science fiction stories. This book is about a young woman who is unhappy with the choices she's made in her life, and tries to kill herself, but does not succeed. Rather, she ends up in a special library hovering between death and life. This special library contains thousands of books filled with stories of the way her life would have turned out, had she made different decisions. She then tries to find, from among the library's "stories" the life in which she is the most comfortable, and her true self.

Haig's novel **How to Stop Time**, published in 2017, is similarly compelling, and you're hearing this recommendation from someone who is more apt to read romance novels than science fiction. The main character is a man who appears to be 40, but in truth is over 400 years old. During the course of his lengthy existence, he claims he has met the likes of such persons as F. Scott Fitzgerald and William Shakespeare. Both my husband and I found this book a keeper (i.e., hard to put down). I'm sure that we are both likely to give a look at earlier books by Matt Haig, including **The Last Family in England**, **The Dead Fathers Club** and **The Possession of Mr. Cave**.

Haig has also written a vampire novel, **The Radleys**, **The Humans**, a novel with an alien as its main character, and a number of children's books.

Haig suffered a mental breakdown when he was 24 years old. In his mid-forties, he still suffers from anxiety. *Cynthia Seacord*

## **The Living Room – A Safe and Supportive Place for Peers to Go Instead of to the Emergency Room, Celebrates Funding from CDPHP**

The Living Room, a walk-in mental health site operating inside the Ellis Medicine Outpatient State Street Clinic Mondays through Fridays between 10 and 6, has a proven track record for de-escalating peer crises and reducing ER visits. This past Monday morning, it got good news, namely that Capital District Physicians Health Plan (CDPC) has donated two years' worth of salaries for the diversion facility's employees. Since its opening in late 2018 as a joint project between Ellis Medicine and Rehabilitation Support Services (RSS), The Living Room has served over 3200 people, and is currently seeing close to 100 guests each month. Most of its guests get the help they need without resorting to hospitalization.

The Living Room has relied on grants and donations in order to stay open. It operates at no cost to its guests, and the cost of provided services are not always covered by insurance. This grant comes at a good time, in the middle of a mental health care crisis growing out (**LR continued page 6**)

**(LR continued)** of inadequate numbers of mental health care professionals to keep up with the ever-growing demand for mental health services.

Guests are welcome to come into the Living Room, to sit and de-stress in its calming milieu. All guests initially get an assessment when they arrive. The staff (a peer counselor, a care manager, and a licensed master social worker and licensed clinical social worker are on the premises) work to identify the extent of the crisis and make appropriate connections between the guest and primary and/or mental health care, and, if necessary, housing, food and legal services. If a crisis is serious, transport to a hospital is arranged.

**The Living Room is located within Ellis Medicine  
1023 State Street, Schenectady 12307  
across from Hometown Health.**

Open Monday through Friday 10am – 6pm  
518-831-1523

**Ellis Medicine Works Tirelessly to Get Staffing  
Of its Psychiatric Programs Back to Normal  
(and Other Community Services News)**

I happen to attend periodic meetings of the Schenectady County Office of Community Services' mental health subcommittee where attendees report that, in general, the various mental health service organizations in our community are no different than those in other areas nationwide; all have been experiencing a significant up-swing in the numbers of persons needing services, especially counselling, while finding an ever-decreasing number of helping professionals, much of it related to a dearth of college students graduating with degrees in the mental health field. The situation is making it all the more difficult for those seeking care, and just as important, those trying to provide it. Our newspapers have reported the recent closure of a section of Ellis Hospital's psychiatric unit due to inadequate staffing numbers, necessitating the diversion of patients to other facilities. Ellis remains committed to getting its staffing levels back to normal so that patients requiring hospitalization do not need to be sent elsewhere.

Providers of outpatient psychiatric service agencies are also experiencing the stress of a clogged system. They are working hard to attract candidates, and get people hired to meet the growing demand. Several service providers have had to discourage wait-lists because they have all that they can do to keep up with seeing that patients discharged from the hospital and those persons in need of care exiting prison and jail settings, receive continuity of care. All are hoping that with college graduations, some good candidates come and work in the Capital Region.

Scholarship incentives and other kinds of encouragements to get young people committed to making their careers in the helping professions should be part of the work being done on various government levels to address this crisis. We can all do our part by writing our elected officials, and in the fall, ensuring that we carefully cast our votes for candidates who understand the severity of this staffing crisis, and are dedicated to doing the vital work needed to alleviate it.

This being said, we do wish those who have done so much to help our folks over the years and are at, or past, retirement age, all the best as they plan for retirement. We just learned, for instance, that Mary May who has been with Ellis Medicine for 16 years is due to retire in a matter of days. Good luck to you, Mary!

Our hats also go off to those who leave the field but continue to volunteer their time and talents.

We recently learned that Dr. Mitta, well known in our community, is now at CDPC Schenectady working 4 days a week, and also helping out at Ellis Hospital.

Mohawk Opportunities is happy to announce that very soon its peers who have been living at Curry House in Rotterdam will be moving to a fully renovated house, yet to be named, at 1574 Union Street, Schenectady. This facility has so many plusses. It is removed from heavy traffic and on an easy to access bus line.

Did you know that earlier this year, the Schenectady County Office of Community Services and Schenectady County Office of Public Health merged? From the staff of these two departments that have merged, we hear that the process of merging has gone well, and (see **Other** page seven)

at [namischenectady@gmail.com](mailto:namischenectady@gmail.com) for information.

(Other continued) that the union has proved to be beneficial to the community at large.

Schenectady County will be getting on board with its own chapter of the Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program that, according to the Internet, “brings United States Armed Forces veterans service members and their families together through veteran-to-veteran collaborative services, social activities, and community service, easing the transition from military to civilian life.” Participants will include those who were dishonorably discharged. For some time, suicides among veterans have been very high. This program, already rolled out in a number of other counties throughout the state, is producing data indicating its success at reducing the suicide rate among vets.

Also being rolled out in the City of Schenectady is a new EMS program through the Fire Department that aims to reduce overdose deaths and response time to emergencies. EMS personnel can connect via I-Pads to emergency room doctors in a telemedical way. The ER physicians, while not psychiatrists, will be able to provide stop-gap prescriptions. They can connect with mental health staff, in order to obtain information that may reduce emergency room congestion, while providing quicker medical assistance. This program, supported by the state Department of Health, is new. Alex Knowlton of the City said Niskayuna is supposed to also get this system. It is hoped that this system will eventually be rolled out to our other townships. Desiring immediacy, surely once the public gets to know about this program, there will be more citizens looking for it. *Cynthia Seacord*

**DID YOU KNOW?** COVID-19 testing and booster shots are available Monday through Friday between 9 and 12 at Ellis Medicine’s “one-stop-shop” located at 600 McClellan Street, the former St. Clare’s Hospital? Now that COVID vaccines are approved by the CDC for our youngest children, additional hours will be added. Currently the lines are short or non-existent; the services have been underutilized.

**NAMI FAMILY TO FAMILY** is a NAMI Signature program for families and friends of people living with mental illness. We hope to offer the 8-class course this fall IF we get enough interest. Contact us



## **NAMI Schenectady works only with your volunteer help.**

- Want to see more issues of our E-News? We need people to write, edit, and lay it out.
- We need others to serve on our committees (these include planning, finance, membership, education, topic meetings, peer social events)

**We need you!**

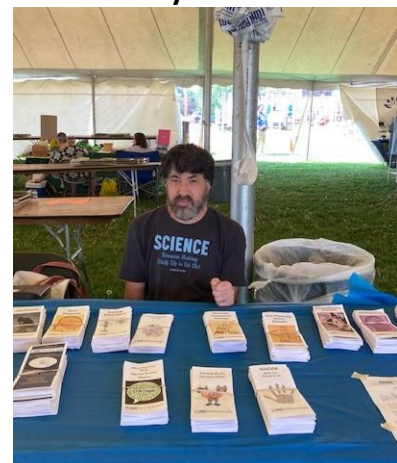
### **NAMI SCHENECTADY PHOTO GALLERY**



**Ribbon Making**



**Our Earth Day Garden at Lock 7**



**Eric at Niska-Day Tabling Event**

**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)

\_\_\_ Additional Donation Total enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

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Name(s)

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Street Address or PO Box

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City, State & Zip

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Cell # \_\_\_\_\_ landline# \_\_\_\_\_

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**