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Howard County

National Alliance on Mental Illness

The Official Newsletter of NAMI Howard County, MD

Volume 80

WINTER 2017

Faith, Spirituality and Mental Illness



Education Forum

Wilde Lake Interfaith Center

10431 Twin Rivers Road, Columbia

MARCH 21st at 7pm



A panel of diverse faith leaders will provide their perspectives, experiences and thoughts on how mental illness is impacted by faith and spirituality. Faith communities can be of tremendous help - offering hope, unconditional love, and support to people who often find themselves stigmatized and isolated from the community--come to this session and learn how.

Our panelists are:

Rabbi Sonya Starr-Columbia Jewish Congregation
Paul Marshall-The Church at Covenant Park
Jen Eschliman-Glen Mar United Methodist Church
Dorothy Harris-Unity Fellowship Church of Columbia

Free and Open to the Public

advocacy
support
respect
hope
recovery
cure
health



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From the Executive Director



Dear Friends:

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2017! We are gearing up for a number of activities in the next few months and hope that you will join us.

This issue of our newsletter focuses on Faith, Spirituality, and Mental Illness. Research has shown that for some, religion and individual spirituality can directly improve physical and mental health. Some people do not believe and are uncomfortable with religion as a part of their recovery, while others were deeply affected by the way they were treated when they shared their mentally illness. We support your decision to do what is best for you. However, many people rely on their faith to reduce the isolation they feel. Congregational prayer, for example, exists in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity. Additionally, congregational gatherings such as Sunday church, Saturday Torah readings, prayer meetings or full-moon celebrations at Hindu temples are popular ways to interact with the community. These group religious rituals provide structured social activities that cause relatively little anxiety and benefit our health directly. Places of worship may also offer a number of resources and social activities that can encourage and support people living with a mental health condition as well as provide additional benefits to them and their families through community connections.

For some, the most important aspect of spirituality is that it offers ways to understand our experiences. The major world religions each offer explanations of why suffering exists in the world. Turning to these explanations brings comfort to many people confronting illness. Contemplative prayer and meditation is one comforting practice that has received a lot of attention. Many studies have found that 10-20 minutes of meditation twice per day creates what is called a "relaxation response" or decreased metabolism, decreased heart rate, decreased breathing rate and slower, calmer brain waves.

In this issue, the co-chairs of our Faith Outreach Committee share their own stories and in March we will be hosting our annual **Faith, Spirituality, and Mental Illness** education forum with diverse faith leaders who will provide their thoughts and experiences with mental illness. Bring your questions and be a part of the conversation.

Beverley Francis-Gibson
Executive Director



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Debbie Meyer and I have co-chaired NAMI Howard County Faith Outreach committee for several years. Though our life experiences with mental illness differ, our faith is the foundation upon which our healing and recovery were built. These are our stories...

My husband and I were members of the same church for 24 years. It was where our four kids grew up, our friendships solidified and our faith matured.

Like most parents, we thought suicide was something that only happened to someone else; like most parents, we were wrong. Our daughter, Casey, lost her battle with depression and died in our home on January 29, 2009. She was only 20 years old.

After Casey's death, our church involvement dropped from being active members to regular attenders, to sporadic, to not at all. Friends returned to the natural rhythm of their lives as well they should, but the natural rhythm of our lives would never be the same. A few close friends stayed in touch but instead of finding solace in our faith community, we found estrangement.

Some rallied around us for a time, some turned and walked away as quickly as they could, without breaking into a run. Some stammered and said things I'm sure they wished they hadn't, but as a faith community, they all had one thing in common, when they were faced with the reality that suicide had taken a front row seat at their place of worship, they did not know how to respond in a way that promoted understanding and healing.

We spent several years floundering in our malnourished faith, until one Sunday morning I summoned the courage to go, alone, to a church about five miles from our home. After the pastor's message, I risked vulnerability and shared with him about the loss of our daughter and my own struggle with depression. Several days later, I also had a chance to talk with a lovely and compassionate woman who was part of the office staff. At the time, the pastor's message had resonated with me. Today, though I don't remember what the topic was, I do remember feeling accepted and cared for. My husband and I started attending regularly and later that year, I was asked to join the church office staff, which I gladly accepted.

Sadly, since that time, there have been more suicides in our community, underscoring the urgency of educating faith leaders and faith communities about mental illness and the importance of providing resources for help and healing.

The Church at Covenant Park has partnered with NAMI Howard County and hosted NAMI Howard County's annual Faith Outreach committee educational forum on *Faith, Spirituality and Mental Illness*.

The faith leaders at The Church at Covenant Park are realizing that education is the key to understanding, understanding is the key to compassion and compassion is the key to getting involved to help promote positive dialogue about mental illness.

My faith gave me the courage to walk through the open door that God provided. In doing so, I received a new perspective, a new purpose and a new faith community in which to thrive and serve.

I am thankful.

By Carla Spence



Living with Mental Illness, living with Faith A Letter to my Faith Community

My name is Debbie Meyer and I live with a mental illness. I did not bring it upon myself by living a negative lifestyle or by having a negative worldview. I am not being punished for having a sinful nature. Mental illness is not a spiritual disorder but a brain disorder caused by chemical imbalances in my brain. It has a genetic component that runs in my family.

When I am in the midst of symptoms, I am unable to think, move, feel, hear, or see anything or anyone. Nothing is part of my life. I do not feel that God is close, or that He loves me. Therefore, faith is not part of my life. Good theology such as 'lets pray together, go to bible study, come to church, read bible passages' is not helpful when I am in utter pain and despair. It only adds to the isolation and stigma, and pushes me further into my illness. I am afraid because I am all too familiar with the stigma attached to mental illness. It is seen as a moral or spiritual failure. Negative reactions are frequently seen when difficult or troublesome mental health conditions occur within the faith community.

Was your first reaction compassion, maybe showing an interest OR fear, simply saying 'I'm sorry' and walking away? Have you noticed that I am not attending Sunday services or going to church meetings? Please don't be afraid of me. Help me stay connected. I can't do this by myself. Look at the faces sitting around you, someone is hurting and afraid to tell you.

However, faith is a very big part of my being and staying in recovery. What does help is when my bible study members tells me not to worry, 'they will pray for me'. Just knowing that people are doing something I would normally be doing takes away the guilt and fear and loneliness of being separated from my God and faith community. I need to feel connected to you, my faith community, my church. What does help is sending cards or emails, leaving messages on my phone. Offers to visit again, ask me questions. It lessens the isolation, it definitely helps with feeling hopeful again, stronger, able to move out of the hole towards an even stronger relationship with others and especially my God and faith.

As I learned more about depression, I realized my church had no open dialogue about mental illness. Why do you want to include people like me and their families in the life and work of the faith community? Because we are already here! The most powerful way to help me, others living with mental illness and their families, and your congregation is to invite NAMI's Faith Outreach Committee to share our stories, provide resources, support, education.

Whatever we are feeling, whatever we are suffering, whatever we are hoping, the Bible has something to say about it. I know it, I believe it, I live it.

Praise be to God.



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Volunteer Spotlight



Cheryl Beebe

Cheryl joined NAMI HC in January of 2016 when she came into the office to inquire about becoming an In Our Own Voice presenter. Cheryl is a mother of two daughters. Cheryl goes on to share, "My oldest daughter lives in New York City and my youngest daughter has been in heaven since December 10th 2000." Cheryl enjoys making jewelry, reading, playing Bid Whist, jigsaw puzzles, coloring, taking walks and being by the water.

Cheryl first heard about NAMI HC through a partial hospitalization program and then a second time through the Partnership Development Group and has been a member since January 2016. Cheryl became motivated to become involved with NAMI HC because as she states, "I like the fact that some of NAMI HC's goals are similar to my own. One goal is NAMI HC's attempt to remove the stigma of mental illness. The other goal is advocating for people with a mental illness. Since being diagnosed (with depression), these are the issues close to my heart."

Cheryl first committed to becoming an In Our Own Voice presenter shortly after joining the NAMI HC family. She has given many IOOV presentations. Cheryl has presented in day programs, hospitals, high schools, colleges, the police academy, and at the NAMI HC conference last year. Cheryl's experience as an IOOV presenter has been, "wonderful".

Recently, she decided to take her dedication to NAMI HC a step further by becoming a Peer to Peer mentor after graduating from the P2P class in spring of 2016. Since then, Cheryl has taught one Peer to Peer class this past winter. Cheryl shares her experience with being a mentor, "It was interesting to sit and talk with people with different types of mental illnesses who are in different stages of recovery. It was enlightening."

NAMI HC has made a tremendous difference in Cheryl's life by giving her the incentive to go on. Cheryl has contributed to ensuring NAMI HC continues to meet people where they are. "NAMI HC has made me feel as though I matter. It's shown me even though I have a mental illness, it doesn't hinder me. I have learned about so many people throughout history who have accomplished remarkable goals despite having a mental illness."



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[NAMI Walks](#) is the largest mental health education and fundraising effort in America. NAMI Walks brings together thousands of individuals and supporters to celebrate mental illness recovery, honor those who have lost their lives to mental illness and help raise funds, combat stigma and promote awareness.

SAVE THE DATE!! Saturday, May 20, 2017

**Join the Maryland
NAMI Walks today!**

Walk starts at 10am

West Shore Park, Inner Harbor, Baltimore, MD
(400-500 Block of Light Street)

NAMI National Convention in the Nation's Capital

June 28 – July 1, for the 2017

[Register
Today](#)

NAMI Is Changing Its Membership Structure

The NAMI Board of Directors periodically evaluates NAMI's membership program to ensure that it meets the needs of the organization and its members. This year the Board decided to add a Household membership category to the membership structure. The Board also decided to increase the dues for Regular and Open Door memberships. All of these changes will become effective as of **July 1, 2017** as outlined below:

- Household Membership \$60
- Regular Membership \$40
- Open Door Membership \$5

We will publish more information over the next few months.



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Events Calendar 2017



Peer-to-Peer *Starting March 8th*

A 10-week course on the topic of recovery for any person with a serious mental illness who is interested in establishing and maintaining wellness. The classes are taught by two trained mentors who are themselves experienced at living well with mental illness. The class meets once a week for 2 hours.

Please contact **Alikah Adair**,
Family & Consumer Program Manager [410-772-9300](tel:410-772-9300)
or email: aadair.namihc@gmail.com to register!



Starting April 24, 2017—A

six-week course specifically designed for parents and other primary caregivers of children and adolescents who are living with mental illness. The course follows a structured format and includes practical insights on issues frequently faced by families dealing with mental illness. The 2.5 hour class is taught by trained parents who have lived similar experiences with their own children. It is not necessary that the child has received a specific diagnosis.

Shop at **Amazon** and donate to NAMI Howard County - at no cost to you! Amazon will make a donation on your behalf! Simply use this link <http://smile.amazon.com/ch/52-1623565>. or you can click on your account at Amazon and designate NAMI Howard County!

Meeting & Support Group Calendar

FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP

Harmony Hall , The Parlor
6336 Cedar Lane, Columbia, MD 21044
2nd Tuesdays, 7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

February 21, March 14, April 11, May 9, June 13

FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP

Celebration Church, Music Room
6080 Foreland Garth, Columbia, MD 21045
3rd Fridays, 7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

February 17, March 17, April 21, May 19, June 16

SUNDAY SUPPERS

Florence Bain Senior Center
5470 Ruth Keeton Way, Columbia, MD 21044
3rd Sundays, 3:00 p.m.

February 12, March 19, April 30*, May 21, June 11**

*date change

FREE EDUCATIONAL FORUMS

Wilde Lake Interfaith Center, 10431 Twin Rivers Road,
Columbia, MD 21044, Room 10/11@ 7:00 pm

*March 21, May 16, July 18,
September 19, November 14*

PARENTS OF CHILDREN

First Presbyterian Church, Room 204
9325 Presbyterian Circle, Columbia, MD 21045
2nd Mondays, 12:00 – 1:30 p.m.

February—No Meeting, March 13, April 3, May 8, June 5

PARENTS OF CHILDREN

First Presbyterian Church, Room 252
9325 Presbyterian Circle, Columbia, MD 21045
Last Wednesdays, 7:30 – 9:00 p.m.

February 22, March 29, April 26, May 31, June 28

TRANSITION AGE YOUTH SUPPORT GROUP

(for parent and caregivers of youth age 18-26)
First Presbyterian Church, Check TV/board for room
9325 Presbyterian Circle, Columbia, MD 21045
3rd Thursday 7:30– 9:00pm

February 23, March 16, April 20, May 18, June 15

NAMI CONNECTION SUPPORT GROUP

Wilde Lake Interfaith Center, Music Room 6
10431 Twin Rivers Road, Columbia, MD 21044
6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

2nd, 3rd and 4th Monday



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THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

Please Join Us (if you haven't already done so)!

When you join NAMI Howard County, you will belong to a network of people like yourself, individuals and families who understand the daily challenges people with mental illness face, and who are working to meet those challenges.

Your membership helps to ensure that life saving information, support, and education programs are available for the people in our community who need NAMI.

You may join online at NAMI National's—NAMI.org, click on "Join NAMI") or complete and return the form below.

YES! I want to support NAMI. I understand that by joining NAMI Howard County, **I will automatically become a member of the state and national levels of NAMI and receive three quarterly publications:**

NAMI Howard County Newsletters
NAMI Maryland newsletter, *Connections*
NAMI National magazine, *The Advocate*

Annual membership dues are: \$35 Individual or Family Membership
 \$ 3 Open Door Membership

Please make checks payable to NAMI Howard County.
SEND TO: NAMI Howard County, 9650 Santiago Road, Suite 1, Columbia, MD 21045

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

PHONE NUMBER _____

EMAIL _____

Enclosed is my tax deductible membership fee of: \$ _____

I have also enclosed an additional tax deductible contribution of: \$ _____

Total Enclosed: \$ _____

I am interested in helping NAMI Howard County and would like to:

- ◆ Join the Public Policy Committee
- ◆ Join the Fundraising Committee
- ◆ Join the Faith Outreach Committee
- ◆ Work, walk, or captain a team at NAMI Walks
- ◆ Deliver information and marketing materials
- ◆ Facilitate a support group
- ◆ Help at Sunday Suppers
- ◆ Teach NAMI Basics
- ◆ Teach NAMI Family to Family
- ◆ Teach NAMI Peer to Peer
- ◆ Speak to Community Groups, Schools
- ◆ Holiday Giftwrapping
- ◆ Write a book or movie review
- ◆ Write an article for the newsletter