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NAMI Connection Support Group Launch

By Kelley Thorpe-Baker

NAMI Tri-Valley is excited to announce our newest program, NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group. This program is a free, peer-led support group for adults (18+) living with mental illness. The group will meet weekly on Wednesday nights at 7:15pm, at St. Clare's Episcopal Church, located at 3350 Hopyard Rd, Pleasanton, CA 94588.

The support group was previously chartered under DBSA (Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance) and has been meeting for several years at St. Clare's. Episcopal Church in Pleasanton. Beginning July 4, 2018, NAMI Tri-Valley will rename and provide the NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group. In preparation, they are giving additional training for the group facilitators as well as support, direction and promotion of the program. This group is open to anyone with a psychiatric disorder regardless of the diagnosis. Due to confidentiality, this is a closed meeting.

What Attendees Will Gain

By sharing your experiences in a safe and confidential setting, you gain hope and develop relationships. The group encourages empathy, productive discussion and a sense of community.

NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group will help attendees to:

- See the individual first, not the illness
- Recognize that mental illnesses are medical illnesses that may have environmental triggers
- Understand that mental illnesses are traumatic events

- Aim for better coping skills
- Find strength in sharing experiences
- Reject stigma and not tolerate discrimination
- Not judge anyone's pain
- Forgive ourselves and reject guilt
- Embrace humor as healthy
- Accept that we cannot solve every problem
- Work for a better future in a realistic way

The Feeling of Being Alone

In my own life, I went through years of feeling incredibly alone after my diagnosis. I remember praying to God one night, tearfully, over all of the pain and hurt I had caused in my mental illness, feeling like the worst person in the world. Feeling like I had let so many people down, burnt so many bridges, and lost so much that could never be regained. I felt like I was the only one to have experienced this much loss; this much pain due to mental illness, and I wanted to be without my illness. I wanted to be "normal", to be healthy and free of the symptoms that have plagued me my entire life.

Finding a Home

The next week, I walked into my first support group for mental illness and my whole world changed. Before then, I had never really known anyone with mental illness, I had only read extensively on the topic.

But I walked into a room of kindred spirits that day; into a room of people like me. People who "got" me,

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people who understood me just by looking into my eyes.

The Power of a Support Group

Over the next few years, the group would provide those opportunities for me (and countless others in the group) to talk openly about our illnesses.

Sometimes, the effect was intense, and tears would flow. Other times, the room would break out into laughter, as we would be topping each other's stories with our own manic tales from our pasts. It seemed that each had outspent the other, out-danced another on a bar top in Mexico. One group member recalled once inviting 500 guests to a party that never happened.

Some believed at one time that they were historical figures reborn. And we all looked at each other with understanding and without judgment and knew that finally, we weren't alone.

Finally, we weren't the "only ones", and finally, we had found a home.

Helping Painful Memories to Lose Their Power

In those Wednesday night meetings, we shared with each other and rallied each other - and we were wonderfully and beautifully healed. Over the years, some have relapsed, some have been stable.

But we all laugh and smile at the nights we would share our tales of our illnesses that had become our most terrible secrets... which we finally released from our hearts in the comfort of each other. And finally, those memories and beliefs that hurt us lost their power.

Peer-to-Peer Leadership

The NAMI Connection Support Group will be facilitated by the two individuals currently leading the Wednesday night meetings, Mark and Jennifer. They encourage you to attend, which will provide insight from hearing the challenges and successes of others.

For additional information, please contact me, Kelley Thorpe Baker, *NAMI Tri-Valley Connection Recovery Support Group Coordinator*, at kelly.baker@me.com or (714) 296-3444. We're looking forward to seeing you there!

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

The Faces of Mental Health

By M. Coleman

At a young age I learned how to be comfortable with being in water, though I cannot swim. Whether it's in the ocean, lake, river, or a pool, so long as I am in the water I am in a familiar place.

When I was 12 my friend's mother took us to Santa Cruz. We were in the ocean for hours when eventually my friend's mom got tired of swimming so she left. I was floating in the water when I was caught in a rip tide and was dragged into the open ocean.

While drowning I fought as hard as I could to stay above water. The waves kept coming and I desperately gasped for air. I continued to fight and scream for help but the water muffled all sound and I suffered silently. The water filled the inside of my body causing all my organs to swell. My body became still and began to sink deeper into the ocean. Just when everything had gone dark, a bright light appeared and even though I was still sinking, the fear was gone. I felt nothing but peace and love.

My natural draw to water is ironic as my entire life has been about struggling to stay above the waves life constantly throws my way. You see, that day when I almost drowned, the ocean didn't care who I was. The ocean doesn't discriminate—it can catch anyone. Mental illness and other mental health related issues do not discriminate either.

There is no one face of mental illness. About 43.8 million (1 in 5 adults) Americans experience mental illness in any given year. This means that many of us know someone who is struggling with a mental health condition. It's important to learn about these conditions as it can and does look different in everyone; therefore each person has their own unique individual struggle. Many people's struggles are made worse by stigma and discrimination. According to mentalhealth.gov, nine out of ten people living with mental illness say that stigma and discrimination have a negative effect on their lives.

There are a few ways you can make life easier for those who are struggling with their mental health. Educate yourself and others, NAMI Tri-Valley provides guest speakers, support groups and educational classes for free; be sensitive to what you say to someone with a mental illness.; and show compassion.

When a person struggles with a mental health problem, they fight as hard as they can to stay above water. Their struggles keep piling up causing more torment then suddenly, everything stops. Sometimes they give up, sink deeper into their struggle, and they are waiting for the light to break through the darkness. We don't have to let them drown. We can be the light. We all have a part to play in eliminating stigma and discrimination.

Caregiver's Block

By Mark Voegele

A text arrived on Sunday. “Hi Mark. [We] will be working on the next Brainstorm newsletter. Please send your article...”

“By when they need it?”

“By end of the week.”

“No problem, I think.”

Tuesday: Here I sit at a local Starbucks, laptop open, and staring at a blank page in Word. Of course I have a document with article ideas—at home, on my computer and unavailable to me here. That’s okay. I have lots of ideas, I’ll dig in anyway.

Tap, tap, tap. Think, think, think. The white page remains unchanged. I’m drawing blanks. I ask myself, “why can’t you come up with a simple thesis to a short article? You teach Family to Family every year. You’ve been dealing with a son with a brain diagnosed brain disorder for nearly 12 years. Surely, there’s something you can put on the page with but a few moments thought to start the creative juices flowing.”

Tap, tap, tap. Think, think, think. Several minutes pass. Still nothing.

“What gives? I’ve done original writing for over 40 years. You’d think with all that experience I could come up with something. This is how feel about trying to talk to my son the past several months... Wait! That’s it. That’s my thesis.”

I’ve started learning to be a dad to a son with a brain disorder in 2006. I took Family-to-Family in 2011. I’ve been teaching it since 2013. I’ve been in family and personal therapy to get our family and me over various hurdles, yet I still get *caregiver’s block*.

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I see him walk through the house. I see what I believe are symptoms of an episode. I review all the tools I’ve learned and taught, but they reflect back at me like the blank page on my screen waiting for ideas to type. I don’t know what to do for him, but I want to believe he would benefit from a word or an act.

“I want to help my son. I want to do that perfect thing, be that perfect support...”

I want to help my son. I want to do that perfect thing, be that perfect support, say just the right words at the right time. I presume you, dear reader, feel the same.

Well, I’m sorry to say, I rarely do the perfect things, provide the perfect support, or say just the right words let alone at the right time. Sometimes I’m paralyzed by the carpet of egg shells before me. I have caregiver’s block. What do I do now?

Tap, tap, tap. Think, think, think. How did I get past writer’s block for this article? I started writing. I started writing about not knowing what to write. I started doing something instead of nothing. I did not care if it had content to meet my goal. I simply started and it turned into a thesis organically. Before long the ideas came together. One idea inspired another and then another. Then the outline formed. The thesis took shape, structure developed, editing rearranged and rewrote most of it. All of this to take the reader on a journey that may serve your needs.

So, when you’re stumped about what to do for your loved one, sit down and think before you act or speak, but don’t let it paralyze you. Start with benign comments or possibly questions. “Good morning.” “How are you feeling.” “I sure slept well last night.” “Want some breakfast?”

I know these examples are morning focused. Don’t let that distract you. The point is stay away from topics that you’ve learned will trigger an unwanted reaction. Build back up to the harder conversations. Practice those skills you’ve learned small ways that are “safe”. In time, it will start to fall in place again (at least for a while). Caregiver’s block will go away—for a time.

STARTING JULY 4, 2018

***NAMI Connections
Recovery Group***

Support Group Calendar

Family/Caregiver Support Group - Livermore

Meets **2nd Monday** of each month:

Monday, May 14, 2018

Monday, June 11, 2018,

Monday, July 12, 2018

7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Livermore Library Board Room

1188 S. Livermore Ave., Livermore

Contact: Marsha McInnis 925.980.5331

marsha@nami-trivalley.org

Parent Resource & Support Group - Pleasanton

Meets **3rd Tuesday** of each month:

Tuesday, May 15, 2018

Tuesday, June 19, 2018

Tuesday, July 17, 2018

7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

5674 Stoneridge Drive, Suite 114, Pleasanton

Contact: Marsha McInnis 925.980.5331

marsha@nami-trivalley.org

Family/Caregiver Support Group - Pleasanton

Meets **4th Monday** of each month

Monday, May 28, 2018,

Monday, June 25, 2018

Monday, July 23, 2018

7:15 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

5674 Stoneridge Drive, Suite 114, Pleasanton

Contact: Marsha McInnis 925.980.5331

marsha@nami-trivalley.org

NAMI is a non-profit, grassroots, self-help, support and advocacy organization of consumers, families, and friends of people with severe mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic and other severe anxiety disorders, autism and pervasive developmental disorders, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and other severe and persistent mental illnesses that affect the brain.

Brainstorm is published by NAMI Tri-Valley, an affiliate of NAMI National and NAMI California.



Annual Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

NEW **RENEWAL**

REGULAR (PER PERSON): \$40

HOUSEHOLD: \$60

OPEN DOOR: \$5

The Open Door rate is available to those whose economic circumstances require it, and entitles you to the full rights and privileges of NAMI membership.

Donation

\$ _____ In Memory Of: _____

\$ _____ In Honor Of: _____

Your dues include membership in NAMI Tri-Valley, NAMI California, and NAMI National. Membership dues are tax-deductible renewable 12 months from initial application. Membership also entitles you to receive NAMI Tri-Valley Newsletter *Brainstorm* and NAMI National *The Advocate*. Tax I.D.# 72-1610675.

Volunteer and make a major difference in the lives of those affected by mental illnesses.

Please send this application form with your check payable to **NAMI Tri-Valley, P. O. Box 5563, Pleasanton, CA 94566**