May is Mental Health Awareness Month….

Shine the Light this month by

Bringing Mental Illness Out of the Shadows!

“If I only had somewhere to go and someone to turn to, how different my life could have been.”

by Jenn Bartone

Living with a parent with a severe mental health condition was not only frustrating and painful, but also isolating and dark. For over 30 years I couldn’t see the light or find hope in my situation. I was merely living day to day as this was my cross to bare.

So much of my life I asked myself: “Why me? Why was I given this burden? Why could I not have it better?” Well, I now know why. I now say… Why Not Me?

In my early 20’s I harbored a lot of anger and resentment and mourned the loss of my mom, or what I like to say, the thought of her. I often wondered what would our future look like, would she be able to help me as I have a family and would she ever help me with my children. What a mom gives her child cannot be put into words, but only felt in her heart. My struggles and lack of having her by my side always left me feeling empty. I did not always understand the difference between my mom and her illness. I loved my mom, but I always hated the illness and everything it had stolen from our lives.

BUT then I realized…this is life! This is how anyone lives with any condition. Whether they have a heart condition, diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer’s high blood pressure or any other physical illness. Why does mental illness feel different? Why do people mock it? Why are people afraid of it? Why don’t we talk about it? We ALL live with something. It’s what you do with it that matters.

Take your diagnosis for example… how can you help others with your experience? Did you ever think maybe there is a purpose and reason for your experience? How can we all learn from each other and find compassion? We bleed the same, we feel the same, we are all just people living with something. But, we are also people that have each other. Isolating your experience is for waste. In my opinion, the most important thing we all have is LIFE! Let’s talk about living and living the best life we can by helping others with what WE have.

My personal experience has given me a great opportunity to give light and share hope to those walking down a similar road. It was only after many years of struggle I stumbled onto this program called NAMI. NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness can be compared to other well-known organizations such as AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) or...
NA (Narcotics Anonymous). NAMI offers hope, support, education and advocacy for those affected by mental health conditions.

As Executive Director of NAMI, I now have the great privilege and blessing to be in a position to help others affected by mental illness. Mental health conditions do not discriminate, come with a manual or instruction guide. To understand mental illness is to live it or live with it. NAMI offers a real life, real people, “real deal” experience that you cannot find anywhere else.

How? NAMI’s Family-to-Family and Peer-to-Peer education classes teach the life skills and coping tools needed to lead you to the path of sustainability, success and recovery. For over 30 years, NAMI programs have proven positive life changing effects Nationwide. NAMI Geauga County is passionate about continuing these programs but we are in great need of Lived Experience Facilitators to teach them. If you would like to teach or support others affected by a mental health conditions, we need you. As a small nonprofit, we rely on volunteers to help us, help others. All of our classes are taught by volunteers, real people sharing their personal experience. Your life story can be a gift if willing to share it. Take that step and reach out to reach others. Free training is provided at various locations and times throughout the year.

I am so excited to announce our new programs and the expansion of current programs being held in our main office located in Chardon, Ohio. Every Monday evening at 7pm, we offer weekly Family and Friends Support Group for those affected by their loved one’s mental health condition. You will gain insight and understanding along with compassion and support as you gather with others. Every Tuesday evening at 7pm we offer a Connections Peer Support Group for people that have a mental health condition. We believe Support is key to wellness. These programs are also available at our Middlefield location.

All NAMI programs are free and open door policy. For more information and other locations of our education classes or support groups, please contact us at 440-286-6264 or visit www.namigeauga.org.

Donate $5.00 and SHINE THE LIGHT on awareness for Mental Health.

Get your GREEN outdoor light bulb for your front porch and Shine the month of May! Please call our office to purchase light bulbs throughout the month of May!
FREE for individuals with mental health conditions.

**MEETING LOCATIONS:**

**EVERY TUESDAY** at 7pm at our NAMI Geauga Annex meeting room at 107 South Street, Chardon.

**EVERY WEDNESDAY** at 7pm, 14999 South State Ave, Middlefield, Ohio, at the Middlefield United Methodist Church.

FREE for family members, partners and friends of individuals with mental health conditions.

**MEETING LOCATIONS:**

**EVERY MONDAY** at 7pm at our NAMI Geauga Annex meeting room at 107 South Street, Chardon.

*The Fourth Wednesday of each month* at 7pm, 14999 South State Ave, Middlefield, Ohio, at the Middlefield United Methodist Church.

TAKE THE stigma-free PLEDGE
Amish Connection

Mental Illness does not choose who is affected by it, but culture, race, gender can affect access to treatment, support and quality of care for many. LET’S CHANGE THIS.

How can we better serve the Amish population?
Please, let us know what resources you are lacking and what services we can offer to your community. Call us at 440-286-6264, mail us a note or stop in at the office at 107 South St. #5, Chardon OH 44024. Everyone is welcome to visit our support group on Wednesday, May 24th at 7pm, where family and loved ones dealing with mental illness gather at the United Methodist Church at 14999 South State Ave, Middlefield. You are welcome to stay or just drop off your message.

Let’s bridge the gap, let us know how we can better help you.

A special THANK YOU to Chardon Dairy Queen for all your support to our organization! Your generous donation is much appreciated and delicious!

You Are Not Alone:
24-hour Geauga County COPELine numbers:
440-285-5665 or 1-888-285-5665
NAMI Helpline:
800-950-6264
CRISIS TEXT LINE: text the keyword 4hope to 741741

NAMI Geauga County’s 2nd Annual Miles for Mental Health Walk
Sponsor, Donate and Participate! Save the Date!

Join us for our Kick-Off Meeting
Monday, May 8th at 4pm
At the NAMI Geauga County office: 107 South Street, Chardon.

This year’s Walk is
Saturday, September 9th, 2017
In the Village of Burton, Ohio!
From the Desk of Elizabeth Johnson, Program Coordinator

Upcoming Training Opportunities:

May 5-7 in Columbus: Peer-to-Peer Mentor Training.
June 2-4 in Middletown: Family-to-Family Teacher Training
June 10-11 in Akron: Family Support Group Facilitator Training
June 23-25 in Columbus: Family-to-Family Teacher Training

FACILITATORS NEEDED!!

Have you been impacted by a NAMI program or support group? Do you remember the help your facilitator provided during your time of need?

Now, we NEED your help.

As we are trying to offer more frequent support groups and educational courses, we need more facilitators. Please consider joining us as a volunteer facilitator; all training and mileage covered by NAMI Geauga. We know your time is precious, but think of the difference you can make.

Victor Matthews, Jr. has been involved with NAMI for the past 9 years, after his parents helped form the Geauga County affiliate. His participation began with the Connections Support Group, back when it was held at the Geauga County Mental Health Board Office. He met a lot of people through the group and learned he was not alone. From there, his involvement grew into becoming certified as a Connections Support Group Facilitator and Peer-to-Peer Course Facilitator. Vic shared that he volunteers because he likes helping people. He reflects that NAMI has helped his family members become more understanding and relate to each other more effectively. Currently, he co-facilitates the weekly Connections Support Group held in Chardon. Besides volunteering with NAMI, Vic loves spending time in the outdoors and works at Punderson State Park. He learned how to hunt with a bow and arrow as a child and still enjoys the sport to this day. His favorite meal comes from his game: barbecued venison backstraps with mushrooms. Vic also enjoys fishing, hiking and hanging out with his friends. When asked what he wished people knew about NAMI, Vic said, "I wish people knew that NAMI was a place to share experiences, whether positive or negative and there are people that will understand and identify with them. NAMI is worth it. It is worth the time. You get out of it what you put into it."
A Special Thank You to all of our 45 Volunteers and Participants that made our part in the Geauga County Maple Festival a big success!

Congratulations.... Our very own Elizabeth Johnson, Program Coordinator, entered her homemade Scones and won 1st Place in the Maple Festival Baking Contest.

Also, a big Thank You to our Partners, Geauga County Board of Mental Health and Recovery Services!
NOTICE: May 11th will be the LAST Family Support meeting to be held in Chesterland at the West Geauga library. Families are invited to join us on Mondays at our Chardon location.

Interested in learning more about mental health, but don’t have the time? Join us for monthly speaker events designed specifically for loved ones of individuals with mental health conditions.

Monday, May 22 – 7-8:30 pm: Coping Skills 101: Tools for Every Day Life
Monday, June 19 – 7-8:30: Planning for the Future: Estate Planning with David Banas

*****Please RSVP by calling the office at 440-286-6264 or emailing Elizabeth at ejohnson@namigeauga.org*****

Live it! Feel it! Experience it! Come to life with STRIVE! Open to anyone aged 18-28 either affected by or living with a mental health condition.

Join us on Friday, May 26 at 6:30 pm for a cook-out, corn hole and outdoor fun at The West Woods Park, Russell.

SAVE THE DATE FOR JUNE!! Friday, June 23 at 6:30 pm will be our next event! Activity TBD

**Please RSVP by calling the office at 440-286-6264 or emailing Elizabeth at ejohnson@namigeauga.org****

Please join us for our quarterly Speaker Meeting: Greg Truhan will be discussing CIT programs and how it affects individuals in a mental health crisis. June 14th, 2017 6:30 pm at NDCL, Chardon.

Come enjoy food and fellowship at NAMI Geauga’s Annual Picnic! July 13, 2017 5:30 pm at Headwaters Park, Huntsburg.
Need More Information?

For more information about Membership, Programs and other Opportunities

Call: 440-286-6264

Visit our Website: www.namigeauga.org

NAMI Geauga County 107 South Street #5 Chardon, Ohio 44024

Executive Director: Jenn Bartone
jbartone@namigeauga.org

Programs Coordinator: Elizabeth Johnson
ejohnson@namigeauga.org

To Receive this Newsletter and other updates by email or regular mail,
Send your Full Name, Email Address and/or Mailing Address to
Kelly Bidlack, Administrative Assistant: kbidlack@namigeauga.org

NAMI Geauga respects your privacy and will never sell or distribute your contact information.

Thank you to our Sponsors and Community Partnerships:

- Margaret Clark Morgan Foundation
- Geauga Board of Mental Health and Recovery Services
- UH Geauga Medical Center
- UH Geauga Home Care
- TDD Law
- Hickman & Lowder, LPA
- Fairmount/Santrol
- Sunrise Springs
- Geauga YMCA
- G-TV
- Giant Eagle
- Heinen’s
- A Dog’s Life
- Road ID
- KTs Custom Logos
- Howling Moon Print and Promo
- Chardon Schools
- Chardon United Methodist Church
- Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition
- Suicide Prevention Coalition, Co-Chair with Ravenwood Health
- Leadership Geauga
- Community Health Improvement Plan, Partnership for a Healthy Geauga
- Family services Planning Committee, Geauga County Job and Family Services
- Chardon Chamber of Commerce
- Chardon Rotary Club
- American Society of Specialists in Aging

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