NAMI Connection
National Alliance on Mental Illness RECOVERY SUPPORT GROUP

Newsletter

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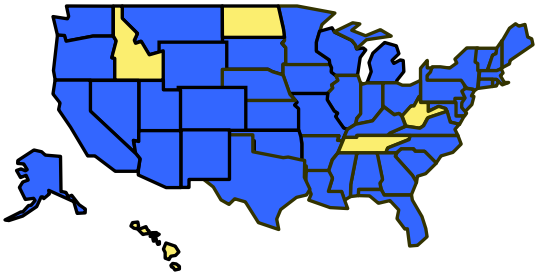
NAMI Connection Celebrates a Successful Rollout

The NAMI Connection program has come a long way since February 2007, when the program was first piloted in Connecticut. Since that first training, the program has hosted over 100 national and state facilitator training events, training nearly 2,000 support group leaders; we have expanded to 45 states in less than three years; we have trained over 100 national and state trainers to continue program growth; we have seen the development of over 400 NAMI Connection groups across the country, and have reached nearly 40,000 participants - 6,000 of which are brand new NAMI Connection! All of this, and NAMI Connection is just getting started.

The program rollout success is due to several combined efforts. Between five expert National Connection Field Managers, an incredible pool of national Connection trainers, highly talented state trainers, hard working state and affiliate leaders, as well as some of the most dedicated people on the planet – NAMI Connection facilitators – this program has taken off in an explosive fashion.

Although our statistics are exciting, this program is more than just numbers… NAMI Connection is a movement. Connection empowers those living well in recovery and gives people a chance to give back. The program provides hope, encouragement, understanding, and of course: sincere uncritical acceptance. NAMI Connection changes lives.

Those of us at the National office are just so pleased with the success of the NAMI Connection rollout, and we realize this was a big cross-organizational group effort. We know thousands of people have benefited from the results of our combined dedication and hard work. To everyone in Connection: thank you all so much, and we can't wait to continue working with you!



In honor of Veteran's Day, NAMI Connection is proud to spotlight Connection Facilitator and Veteran, *Candace True*

The NAMI Connection group at the WBJ DORN VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Columbia, SC has been meeting for almost 2 years. It was a slow beginning and I was the sole facilitator until I began mentoring someone last Spring. The first few months I sat alone waiting for someone to show up. The group has now grown to the size that if everyone showed up at once we would have around 17 attendees. We have a good core group of 5-6 people, and Providers are now recommending clients attend the group.

Veterans have a unique relationship with each other. It doesn't matter where you served, what service you were in, when you served, combat or a 'desk job', "we were all in the same foxhole together". It is a camaraderie that cannot be broken or explained to those who did not serve. We speak the same jargon and often do not have to go into a lot of detail to understand the emotions we feel. Connection allows us to support each other as peers.

We recently had five Veterans go through a Connection facilitator training and in early 2010 we are planning to begin a NAMI Connection women's group in the VAMC. Within a year, plans are underway to begin a group at one of the rural Veteran Community Based Outpatient Centers.

Testimonials

The Connection group is the best one because people can solve problems there. It isn't just a bunch of sad stories; people are coming up with solutions and stuff to do for the next week. One of our group attendees is taking her meds and getting herself to her counselor and is just about able to go back to her career in great part due to Connection.

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For me, NAMI Connection gives me hope for recovering on a daily basis with my mental illness, and also to spread the word of public awareness for mental illness.

Training Progress:

Facilitator Trainings: 112

Total Facilitators Trained: 1,899

Total Support Groups: 430

For more information on NAMI Connection:

- Visit our website at www.nami.org/connection
- Call the HelpLine at 1(800) 950-NAMI (6264)
- Send an email to connection@nami.org

NAMI Connection 2010 Staff Changes

As the NAMI Connection rollout will come to an end in December 2009, the National team will also look different.

First, it is my pleasure to welcome the new NAMI Connection Program Assistant, Veronica Guerrero, to the team. Veronica started with us on October 1, 2009, and has hit the ground running. She graduated from the University of Puerto Rico, is highly organized, and is passionate about our cause. Veronica is a delightful addition to our team and will be helping us as we roll out the program in Spanish next year.

Second, it is with much regret that as of December 31, 2009 we will be losing three of our very talented Field Managers. We will be saying good-bye to Harriet Cohen, Deanna Green and Carol Porch. What they have accomplished in their time at NAMI has been invaluable and we are so fortunate to have had the opportunity to work so closely with each one of them. Please help me in wishing these fabulous ladies well in their new journey.

Please stay tuned for the January NAMI Connection Newsletter where we re-introduce your existing NAMI Connection team members and give you an idea of what the new state configuration and support will look like. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact Candita Sabavala, NAMI Connection Program Director, if you have any questions.

Harriet Cohen: *It has been a privilege and an honor to have been one of the founding Field Managers in the NAMI Connection Program and to watch it grow over the past three years. I wish the program continued success in all that you move forward with.*

Deanna Green: *Being involved in and helping to launch this life-saving program we call Connection has been such an important step in my journey to wellness. Connection is changing lives daily. People with mental illness no longer have to suffer in silence. We have a place to go to receive the help only other peers can offer. It keeps us connected. It helps us stay well and live better quality lives. That's what I call serving a higher purpose and I'm so grateful to have been a part of its success. NAMI for life!*

Carol Porch: *My experience working with NAMI Connection at the national level has been short but oh so very sweet. I have loved having this level of responsibility in trainings, and being able to give input on the program that has changed my life. Meeting and working with the fantastic executive directors and coordinators in the states has not only been a pleasure but also has expanded my knowledge. I am so appreciative of the marvelous and caring job so many people in our organization exhibit on a daily basis. Connection changes lives and saves lives and I am proud to have been part of it!*

NAMI Connection Hosts Another Successful Training of State Trainers!

October was a busy month for the NAMI Connection Team, and we started it off with an excellent group of new state trainers in St. Louis. We now have 17 more talented trainers in our states to continue to teach new facilitators how to run NAMI Connection support groups, bringing our total of National and State trainers to well over 100!

The next training of state trainers will take place in late April 2010 in St. Louis, so please stay tuned for application deadlines in the new year!

NAMI Connection and the Education Leadership Academy

The NAMI Connection team was thrilled to be able to help host the 2009 Education Leadership Academy in St. Louis at the end of October. Together with the rest of the Education Department staff, we were able to bring together state program leaders from all over the country for three days of plenaries, workshops, networking sessions and a lot of FUN!

Plenary sessions included presentations on Marketing, Standards of Excellence; Cultural Diversity and Inclusion; The Power of Community Partnerships; 21st Century Outreach; The Hearts and Minds Program; and Growing Leaders through NAMI Consumer Programs.

In addition to the plenaries, we had a number of workshops led by our attendees, as well as a "Best Practices Café" where attendees could go and network with each other and see examples of what states are doing successfully in their programs, not to mention program intranet tutorials. We were also able to host an entertaining dinner on Saturday night featuring hula dancing and lessons, and of course the "not ready for prime time" Academy Follies!

Upcoming Facilitator Trainings

November 20-22: Rutland, Vermont

December 1-3: Rapid City, South Dakota

December 4-6: Birmingham, Alabama

December 4-6: Boston, Massachusetts

December 4-6: TBD, Kentucky

December 4-6: TBD, Pennsylvania

HAPPY HOLIDAYS FROM THE NAMI CONNECTION TEAM!

SEE YOU IN 2010