



NAMI

National Alliance on Mental Illness

NORTH CENTRAL FLORIDA

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Serving Alachua, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy & Union Counties

Co-President's Corner

2006 NAMI WALK

The First Annual Gainesville NAMI Walk at Westside Park on April 1 was a great success! Over 110 walkers and participants joined in a colorful and enjoyable public display of unity celebrating hope, dignity, honor, and recovery in the lives of people with a mental illness and their families.

Several different memorial walk teams walked in public as a memorial to their loved one. In addition to friends, family members and folks with a mental illness, walkers included many providers representing all facets of mental health care. These included the Chairman of the UF Department of Psychiatry and UF faculty psychiatrists, other psychiatrists and psychologists, mental healthcare administrators, nurses, folks from Vista, Meridian and FACT, and more!

The Walk raised over \$2600.00 in funds that are already being used primarily to enhance our local education efforts, support groups, and public awareness activities. A portion of these monies will go toward NAMI-Florida state level lobbying and watchdog efforts to promote legislative agendas favoring medical, social, and research issues concerning the mental illnesses.

Don't forget to wear your Walk T-shirts throughout the year. We are already planning for next year's walk!

MAY MEETING

Our speaker for the May 8th will be **Arupa Chiarini Freeman**, advocate for homeless persons in Alachua County. She will speak on issues facing homeless people, particularly those with mental illness.

Please bring a small item for our **Home Van** basket that we can give to Mrs. Freeman to distribute to the homeless in our area. Consider bringing one of the following: bottled waters, batteries, jeans, t-shirts, bug spray, hygiene items such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo; canned food products, candy, and especially Ensure, Boost, and Diabetic Ensure.

NAMI of North Central Florida has a new meeting place. We will meet at Trinity United Methodist Church, 4000 NW 53rd Avenue, at 7:15 p.m. Enter through the Educational Building door, under the drive-up portico, and take the elevator or stairs on your right to Room 224 on the second floor. Go down the hall straight ahead and the room is on the right.



A few participants at the 2006 NAMI NCF Walk

A Hopeful Future for People with Mental Illnesses

...The media fails to correct the stigma associated with mental illnesses and recognize the diseases are usually controllable.

by Stefani Osborne - Gainesville Sun, April 30, 2006

In a March 20 *Speaking Out*, Virginia Seacrist wrote that we - that is, people like me who have a mental illness - are "the helpless, the hopeless and often the homeless." I disagree with that word "hopeless."

Yes, a mental illness can be crippling. It can (and frequently does) ruin lives, families, careers, and friendships. However, I believe that there's always hope.

New medications are developed all the time, and new types of therapy are helping those with mental illnesses regain control over their diseases and their lives. Being diagnosed with a brain disorder is not a life sentence. Even Seacrist's son is recovering, a fact which I was happy to read.

I have a mental illness. It's a chronic illness just like diabetes or arthritis. I freely tell my acquaintances about it because I refuse to give in to the pain of shame that modern American culture places on people with a brain disorder like mine.

I spent most of my twenties struggling with what was eventually diagnosed as being schizo-affective disorder, which is a medical condition that causes extreme mood swings as well as hallucinations, delusions and other schizophrenia-type symptoms. For many years I could not work or go to school. I had to move in with my mother for a long period because I was too ill to support myself. I was, well . . . crazy.

Thanks to medications and therapy, I've been able to resume a productive role in society. I work. I go to school part-time at Santa Fe Community College, with plans to eventually get my doctorate in clinical psychology.

I am happily married to a supportive man, who is himself in remission from major depression. I have good friends, a loving family, and nobody would ever guess that I have a brain disorder/mental illness unless I tell them.

But I do tell them. I am "out of the closet" to just about everybody in my life. Why should I have to feel the artificial shame that our society puts on the mental illnesses? I have a chronic illness that's controllable, just like diabetes or arthritis.

But not everyone can be as public as I can about their mental disease because they feel that widespread stigma could affect their life. They have experienced discrimination and prejudice in job opportunities, in obtaining health insurance, and in everyday social situations.

Not only are they affected directly, but they feel that they need to protect their own children, spouses, and family members from being affected by discrimination and stigma, too.

The message our society sends is that it is not OK to have a mental illness. Too many people think they're alone in dealing with these illnesses. Too many people believe that recovery is impossible. That's why I feel speaking out is important. Too many people believe we're hopeless, and that's simply not the case.

A friend of mine likens mental illness to cancer - it's a scary diagnosis, but there's a huge spectrum between a fully removable skin cancer and a terminal cancer. The majority of people with mental illnesses experience full or partial recovery. Popular media fails to mention that fact when it's making a profit depicting us all as homicidal maniacs, pathetic wretches, or amusing eccentrics. No matter what the portrayal, the implication is that once you're crazy, you're always crazy. And that's simply not true.

Mental illnesses are terrible, debilitating diseases for which there are currently no permanent cures. But there is medication, there is therapy, and there is - most importantly - hope.

Stefani Osborne is on the Board of the local chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) (www.NamiGainesville.org), and is a certified facilitator of a support group for people with a mental illness. Her support group, NAMI-C.A.R.E. (Consumers Advocating Recovery through Empowerment), meets on the first and third Mondays of each month at Vista Pavilion at 7:30 p.m. Additional information is at this Web site: http://www.namigainesville.org/images/NAMI_CARE_flyer.pdf.

WIRED resources!

www.NamiNorthCentralFlorida.org
or
www.NAMIGainesville.org

This series of articles is to help our members and friends become aware of all that is available to us through our NAMI North Central Florida website. Links are provided to many resources of interest, including:

- *Prescription Assistance for Low Income www.NeedyMeds.com*
- *A resource for people who cannot afford medicine or other healthcare costs*
- *MediCAID and SSI Benefits in Florida*
- *Legal Help for Medicaid*
- *Legal Help for Mental Health*
- *MediCARE Overview*
- *Social Security Information (Federal)*
- *Estate Planning Guidance for Special*
- *Needs, including family members with Medicaid, SSI, or living in group homes.*
- *National Advocacy Center*
- *Other Mental Health Organizations, and many other resources*
- *What do consumers say they want and need during a psychiatric emergency*

Family to Family Class

The next Family to Family classes will begin Wednesday, August 16. This is a 12-week course for families of individuals with severe brain disorders (mental illnesses).

The course is taught by trained family members. All course materials are furnished at no cost to participants.

The course discusses the clinical treatment of mental illnesses and teaches the knowledge and skills that family members need to cope more effectively.

We are now adding names to the waiting list.

For information call :

Michelle 352-332-9881
Dianne 352-378-1798
Voice Mail 352-339-8640

People with a Mental Illness Enrich our Lives...

This is one of a series of informational bits about people throughout history who have had or whose family members have had a serious mental illness.

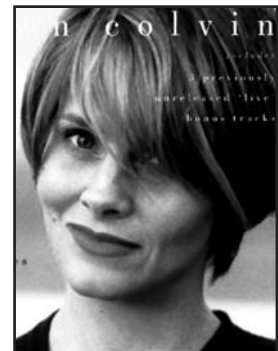
Shawn Colvin, pop-folk singer/songwriter and winner of three Grammys, has struggle with depression for most of her 47 years.

In "*Trouble*," a cut from her 1997 Grammy-nominated album *A Few Small Repairs*, Colvin captures the kind of leaden emotions that can grab a person and not let go.

"Now I know the business of the heart," she sings, "And it'll get you anyway it can. Need someone to walk with in the dark, well, I'm your man."

"I think there's a misconception that if one is an artist and, like myself, sings sad or sensitive material, that you're risking losing that if you treat depression," she said. "But when I've been seriously biologically depressed I'm actually unable to do anything. In fact, being treated for depression restores me to be able to do what I do," Colvin explained. "So, for people who are familiar with my music and like it, they should know that 90 percent of my recorded work has been done while I've been taking medicine for depression."

Shawn Colvin stresses one should not feel it's their fault they have depression or brain disorder, but it is their responsibility to treat it.



Shawn Colvin

NAMI North Central Florida
 an affiliate of
NAMI and NAMI Florida
P.O. Box 90114
Gainesville, FL 32607
3 5 2 • 3 3 9 • 8 6 4 0



<http://www.naminorthcentralflorida.org>

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NAMI NCF Offers Writing Workshop

Sharon Hildebrand will be facilitating a process writing workshop for NAMI NCF participants, meeting weekly for 6 weeks, one evening a week, beginning in June. The location and exact time will be determined by the participants. The registration fee of \$5.00 can be paid on or before the first session. Participants will need to bring their own writing supplies - notebook, paper, pens, pencils, or laptop.

Process writing is a way to explore memories or moments of our life. Sharon will guide us in using two writing genres: memoirs and non-rhyming poetry. The group provides interpersonal support in the very personal process of looking at segments of our lives. There will be voluntary opportunities to share the writing and insights within the group, thereby creating a new way for us to support each other.

Note that this is not a class about language usage conventions such as punctuation, capitalization and verb tense; it is not “English 101”. It **is** an opportunity for a bit of personal recording and exploration and interpersonal support.

For more information call or to sign up for the workshop call Joan Stevens 378-0886 or go to www.NAMIGainesville.org and scroll to the bottom, click on the “email” icon. In the subject of your email put “writing workshop”.