



NAMI an invaluable community resource for help with mental illness

By Melanie Dallas, LPC

The first weekend in November, staff from Highland Rivers Health joined more than 500 mental health advocates, individuals living with mental illness and family members for the 2017 NAMI Walk in Rome. The 5k walk helped raise more than \$60,000 for the Rome chapter of NAMI (the National Alliance for Mental Illness), which serves communities across northwest Georgia – in fact, the same counties served by Highland Rivers Health.

If it seems that having two mental health agencies serve the same area may be a duplication, there is an important difference in the type of services provided. Whereas Highland Rivers provides direct clinical therapy to individuals with mental illness, NAMI provides support, education, training and advocacy for individuals, families and communities. NAMI's work complements our services, and is a vital component of a strong community-based mental health system.

In previous columns, I've written about many aspects of mental illness, including how common it is – one in five people will have mental illness in their lifetime – and its impact on individuals that have it, who can feel helpless, hopeless and stigmatized. But the effects of mental illness often go well beyond individuals and impact their community, friends, coworkers and especially family members. These are all areas where NAMI can help.

Below is a list of services the Rome chapter of NAMI provides in northwest Georgia to help families, individuals and communities learn about mental illness. Note that all of these services are available at no cost.

- NAMI Basics is a class for parents and other family caregivers of children and adolescents who have either been diagnosed with a mental health condition or who are experiencing symptoms but have not yet been diagnosed.
- NAMI Family-to-Family is a class for families, partners and friends of individuals with mental illness. The course is designed to facilitate a better understanding of mental illness, increase coping skills and empower participants to become advocates for their family members.
- NAMI Peer-to-Peer is a recovery education course open to anyone experiencing a mental health challenge. The course is designed to encourage growth, healing and recovery among participants.

- NAMI Connection is a weekly or monthly support group for people living with a mental health condition.
- NAMI Family Support Group is a weekly or monthly support group for family members, partners and friends of individuals living with a mental illness.
- NAMI Smarts for Advocacy is a hands-on advocacy training program that helps people living with mental illness, friends and family transform their passion and lived experience into skillful grassroots advocacy.
- NAMI In Our Own Voice is a presentation for the general public to promote awareness of mental illness and the possibility of recovery.

In addition to the services listed above, NAMI provides mini-grants of up to \$500 to community organizations and agencies to support programs for individuals with mental illness, their families or communities, provide education and help reduce the stigma of mental illness. These mini-grants, and the services listed above, are made possible through fund-raising efforts such as the NAMI Walk as well as annual membership dues for individuals and families that wish to join the organization.

At the national level, NAMI remains a leading voice for mental health in Congress and federal agencies. Its website, www.nami.org, contains valuable information about mental illness, advocacy, signs and symptoms, recovery and much more. In Georgia, NAMI Georgia has a list of all NAMI chapters and programs in the state; visit <https://namiga.org>.

Finally, in northwest Georgia, NAMI Rome serves all the counties and communities served by Highland Rivers Health. Learn more about the services available close to home by visiting www.namirome.org.