

JULY-AUGUST 2014

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*Our Mission: NAMI Greater Seattle addresses the unmet mental health needs within our community through support, referral, education, and outreach.*

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## Letter from the Executive Director

Dear NAMI Greater Seattle Friends and Supporters,

Summer is in full swing and I hope you're all out enjoying the mental health benefits of the great outdoors. Studies show that spending time in green spaces can reduce stress and depression! Getting outside is good for the mind.

Did you notice anything different on the cover of the Spotlight? In June, we had a board and staff retreat where we put our brains together to refresh our mission statement for 2014. Our activities remain the same, but the updated mission statement reflects more inclusivity of *all* people impacted by mental illness of all kinds.

We look forward to hosting an Open House on Wednesday, August 13<sup>th</sup> from 4-6:30pm. Come enjoy appetizers and ice cream with NAMI Greater Seattle! Take a look at the result of all our volunteers' hard work this spring, refreshing the interior of our building. Plus, have a chance to chat with some of our board members and staff about what makes you proud to be part of NAMI. We'll share some of your comments on our social media pages afterwards, so be sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

See you soon!  
-Ashley Fontaine



2014 NGS Board & Staff Retreat



What a month May was for NAMI Greater Seattle! We are so inspired by the generosity of our supporters. Donors, walkers, caped crusaders: thank you for all that you do. We absolutely couldn't do this work without your contributions of time, effort, funds, and spirit.

give  
**BIG**

 The Seattle Foundation

**GiveBig** took place on May 6<sup>th</sup> this year, and you contributed over \$6,000. That's an increase of about \$1,000 compared to last year – you took BIG to the next level!

**NAMIWalk Washington** hosted 700 walkers on May 17<sup>th</sup>. Our dedicated team captains and walkers managed to reach our ambitious \$40,000 goal. YOU made it happen!



## Upcoming Events

July 19: Mental Health First Aid, 9am-5:30pm

St. James Cathedral, 804 9<sup>th</sup> Ave., Seattle, WA 98104

\$100 fee to attend, registration required. Some scholarships available. Call (206) 783-9264.

August 13: NAMI Greater Seattle Open House

802 NW 70<sup>th</sup> St., Seattle, WA 98117

Join us for appetizers and ice cream at the NAMI Greater Seattle office from 4pm-6:30pm.

September 18: Mental Health 2014 Bridging the Gap

Shoreline Conference Center, 18560 1<sup>st</sup> Ave. NE, Shoreline, WA 98155

Provided by University of Washington Continuing Nursing Education

Registration is filling up fast! Visit [www.uwcne.org](http://www.uwcne.org) for details.

*Looking for more NAMI signature programs? We're gearing up for fall! Contact Lyndsay Campbell at [office@nami-greaterseattle.org](mailto:office@nami-greaterseattle.org) to be added to a specific program list, and we'll contact you as classes become available.*

## Summer Support Link Hours

**July 1<sup>st</sup> through September 1<sup>st</sup>, Support Link will be open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday.**

Support Link will be closed on Wednesdays for organizational development. We will check messages for urgent calls and email can still be sent to [supportlink@nami-greaterseattle.org](mailto:supportlink@nami-greaterseattle.org).

**Regular Monday-Friday hours will resume starting September 1<sup>st</sup>.**

## What Returning to Work Was Like for Me by Tom

I was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder in 2003. In 2008, after four and a half years at Western State Hospital, I was released into the community. As a person with a severe mental illness, I qualified to receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits from the Federal government, Section 8 housing to make sure I had a place to live, and \$120 in food-stamps to make sure I had enough to eat. I received Medicaid and Medicare benefits. **At the time of my release, I did not think I would be able to work at a paying job ever again so I expected to live in poverty for the rest of my life.**

In the Hospital, I learned the skills necessary to make sure I received the mental healthcare I needed, but living alone was the first time I had full responsibility for my own schedule. Looking back, I now realize that the first step to get back to work was keeping my routine for those appointments. I had to learn how to manage a schedule. Since I did not own a car, I used the bus system frequently and that's how I later commuted to volunteer and work which is another skill I didn't realize would be so helpful. During the 18 months following my release, I often felt isolated and bored. My days were mostly spent walking and reading which was about all I could afford to do for entertainment. I wanted more out of life and that led me to the next step.

In 2010, I started volunteering and that turned out to be the second step toward getting a full-time job. Back then, **what I knew best was dealing with mental illness so I found an opportunity at NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.** At that time, any break in routine was hard for me. Therefore, I started out slow. I manned the phone lines on Friday afternoons and I helped out as a back-up facilitator for a support group for people managing Schizophrenia or Schizoaffective disorder for a total of five hours per week.

This volunteer work helped me add two more important skills: 1) be a good listener and 2) assist people to find resources to help with their mental health issues. Volunteering also helped build my schedule management skills as well as my endurance for going to a place, spending time there doing something, and being more responsible.

**Volunteering helped my mental state** because it got me out of the house, I enjoyed being around other people at the NAMI office, my self-esteem went up since I was contributing to the community, and I got to meet people managing a mental illness like me.

The third step toward full-time employment was harder and I suggest taking it slow. In February 2012, I got a part-time job working 18 hours per week. 18 hours per week was a huge jump from not working and I don't recommend it if you can help it. I think it is much better to start with less hours. I was working from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., three days a week, plus commute time. It was very important for me to get to sleep early so I could get up early and I found it necessary to keep that routine even on non-workdays. I figured out that I had a hard time with side-effects of my medication clouding my thinking in the morning. To minimize the impact, I tried to wake up even earlier to take my medicine. Sometimes the side-effects were not completely worn off until around 10:00 AM.

## Returning to Work (Cont'd)

As a new employee I was often assigned the simplest work and my manager seemed to understand my limitations. Even though I tried as hard as I could, I found the work difficult. It was also hard to keep up with my other obligations: as part of my relapse prevention routine, I had 7-10 mental health appointments each month. It was difficult to schedule and keep those appointments when I was working so many hours.

When you work part time, there is a balancing act between income and benefits. In my case, my income from work was such that I could keep my whole SSDI check. However, my income did affect my SSI and Section 8 benefits, and I no longer qualified for SSI. Fortunately, I was able to obtain a different kind of medical coverage similar to Medicaid, but for working people, so my healthcare costs did not increase. For the first six months I worked I did not have to pay higher rent because Section 8 has a grace period before they count the new earned income. SSDI also has a trial work period, the time you get to try out working and see if you can do it, before you lose your SSDI benefits. **Everyone's benefits will be affected differently, so it is important to check with the Social Security office before going to work.**

The fourth step for me was finding full-time work I could excel at with the limitations I have from my mental illness and medication side-effects. In 2012, I started working full-time as a Peer Specialist and I still work there today. I work swing shift from 3:00 PM to 11:30 PM, which means the worst of my medication side-effects are not a problem since they happen in the morning. **It was a real shock to spend 8.5 hours in one place. And even more of a shock to do it five days a week.** At first, making this adjustment did add a lot of stress to my life. I still have trouble sometimes doing the cooking/cleaning/laundry/grocery shopping and such that is all part of life. I commute to work by walking, and I have supportive coworkers who often give me a ride home. When I first started work I felt like I had no clue what I was supposed to be doing. Fortunately, I had great coworkers who patiently explained things to me, but it was still very stressful. I felt like I had so much to remember and so much to do, but I kept trying because I had a job to do.

To this day I get stressed out with changes in routine and tasks. When I gave up Section 8 housing, I felt like I was taking a big risk and that was very stressful. I still worry about that sometimes when money gets tight. I worry that if I lose work I won't be able to keep my apartment, and will have to move back in with my family (I feel lucky to have family I can move in with though). **Even with my worries, the benefits of working full-time far outweigh the complications it brings.**

Even with all of the challenges, **working was a very positive experience for me.** I really liked being around people. I made some friends and got to joke around. I still had insecurities because of my paranoia that made it hard sometimes, but over time my confidence built up and I felt better.

I really enjoy spending time with my coworkers and don't feel lonely like I used to before I started working. I earn a living wage now, and I am no longer below the poverty line. I am contributing to the community by doing my work which is very satisfying. I feel good about getting off of disability benefits, Section 8, Medicaid, Medicare and food-stamps. **Each step I took in my recovery: caring for myself, volunteering, working part-time, or**

**working fulltime increased my satisfaction with life.**

**-Tom**

## Corporation for Supportive Housing

As we announced in early June, the Corporation for Supportive Housing was contracted to provide technical assistance regarding the Hofmann Houses. CSH provided their report to NAMI Greater Seattle on June 23, and the report was shared with our supporters on June 30<sup>th</sup>. At this time, the NAMI Greater Seattle Board of Directors is seeking additional information before making a decision on any changes to the Hofmann House program. As always, community members are invited to contact our office with questions, concerns, or comments. Thank you for your patience!

## Support Group Announcements

### Newcomers to Appreciative Living Group

Thursdays, July 17, 24, 31, & August 8 from 6pm-7:30pm.

The Appreciative Living Learning Circles for young adults (age 18-35) who have been diagnosed with schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder or who have ever had the experience of psychosis has been meeting for four years now. Our group is getting quite large! If you would like to join us but would like to start out in a smaller group, this is just the group for you! The Newcomers' Group will be run by three participants of the Friday night group. In a series of four sessions, you will get to know some of the Friday night regulars, learn how our group works and learn the philosophy of Appreciative Living.

### Knitting Group

The Knitting Group on Wednesdays has been cancelled. If you are interested in hosting this group, please contact our office.

## Seeking Board Member Applications for 2015!

Can you envision a greater Seattle where community members openly talk about how mental illness has touched their lives? Are you passionate about the NAMI Greater Seattle mission? Consider applying for the NAMI Greater Seattle Board of Directors!

Our board meets monthly, with board members serving on specific committees related to their interests and skills. Our goal is to develop a board that accurately represents the diversity of community members impacted by mental illness.

Expectations:

- Dedicate 4-10 hours/month
- Leverage personal networks to spread the NAMI mission
- Maintain current membership at NAMI Greater Seattle

We will accept applications through August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014 for board terms starting January 2015. Please email [director@nami-greaterseattle.org](mailto:director@nami-greaterseattle.org) or call (206) 783-9264 for an application. We can't wait to hear from you!



### **NAMI Greater Seattle**

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