



nami

National Alliance on Mental Illness

NORTH CENTRAL FLORIDA

February 2005 • Vol.5, No. 2 Serving Alachua, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Levy & Union Counties

February Meeting

Our February Meeting will be February 19 at 7:15. This will be a support group meeting - People Reaching Out to People - what we refer to as P.R.O.P.

We will meet at Shands at Vista Medical Park off of NW 39th Avenue at 4101 NW 89th Blvd. The receptionist will direct you to the correct meeting room. Hope to see you there!

BEING AN ACTIVIST ... MAKING A DIFFERENCE

NAMI members have many concerns and issues. We are the “experts” on living with, supporting, or caring for a mentally ill person. There are several ways to make ourselves heard by the community and policy makers. Over the next few issues of this newsletter we’ll explore some of these ways and make suggestions on how we can most effectively communicate with others to cause change.

Writing Letters to the Editor of Local Newspapers

Letters to the editor are an easy way for you to voice your opinion to policymakers and to educate readers about issues that concern you. You can use letters to correct or interpret facts in response to an inaccurate or biased article, to praise or criticize a recent article or editorial, or simply provide your opinion on a current issue. Without exception, the letters section is one of the most highly read sections in any newspaper or magazine, and now many web sites also have places for readers to comment instantly on issues of the day. Make sure you read the paper before you write to get an idea of the format, and be sure to have the name of the editor you’re addressing. Don’t miss out on this chance to reach the

public—write early and often!

- **Be timely** - Capitalize on recent news and events, within 24 hours of a story if possible.

- **Keep it short and simple** - Keep your points clear and stick to one subject. If you look at the editorial page, a few paragraphs is all they usually print!

- **Think locally** - Demonstrate how this issue affects you locally, and mention lawmakers by name to ensure you get their attention. If you mention an elected official or others, it’s a good idea to send them a copy too!

- **Sign your letter** - Include your name, address and telephone number. Papers may need to contact you if they are considering printing your letter. Don’t worry—they won’t print your phone or street address.

- **Follow-up** - If the newspaper doesn’t call you, call the newspaper. Ask to speak to the person in charge of letters to the editor. Ask if they plan on printing your letter, and if not, see if they have any feedback for you.

Don’t be discouraged if your letter is not printed. Every time you submit a letter, you are educating the editorial board of your paper and paving the way for future letters to be printed. Keep trying!

Writing Opinion-editorials

Opinions-editorials are written by local citizens, experts, leaders of organizations - people like you. If you can get one printed, op-eds are an extremely powerful and cost-effective way to both educate a large number of readers about our issues, and to influence policymakers. The pointers for writing a letter to the editor are also applicable for op-eds. In addition, consider the following:

- **Timing** is the most important factor in whether the newspaper picks up your submission. Is this issue already in the news? Is a controversial vote scheduled in Congress? Is there an appropriate holiday or anniversary you can relate your piece to, or is there a recent article or editorial to which you can respond? Remember that it can take up to a week for a paper to review submissions, but it’s still a good idea to check and see if your piece is being considered.

- **It’s the messenger and the message.** Finding a prominent person to sign the letter will have a big influence in the paper’s consideration. For example, Judy Bousquet is a known local activist in the Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition and personally lost a son to

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suicide. Bruce and Joan Stevens, are known local activist on mental health issues and Bruce is a part of the Shands medical community about which he writes.

Know the guidelines of the newspaper. Text of an op-ed should be 300-500 words. You'll need to identify yourself, and you might suggest a title. Many papers require exclusivity, meaning that you can't submit to another paper at the same time. Find out how submissions work - increasingly, editorial departments prefer e-mail. Again, read the paper's editorial page to see how their format

works. Get the name and address of the op-ed page editor before you mail it off.

Call to follow-up. Ask if your submission is under consideration. Even if they don't publish your piece this time, this is a great opportunity to educate the editor about the issue. Building a relationship with editors and reporters will prove helpful in the future. It might even lead to an editorial meeting

Within the past 90 days three NAMI members have had letters to the editor or op-ed articles or published in the Gainesville Sun. **Joan Stevens** wrote a

letter to the editor 'Openness Helped Destigmatize Dementia'; **Judy Bousquet** wrote about 'The Terrible Loss from Suicide' and **Bruce Stevens** wrote a letter 'Getting Rid of Psychiatry Space at Shands Is an Act of Stigma.' Published in this newsletter are two of these - examples of opinion-editorials, "op-ed," as a communication tool. If you can get one printed, op-eds are an extremely powerful and cost-effective way to both educate a large number of readers about our issues, and to influence policymakers.

Let's each look for opportunities to speak out!



The Terrible Loss from Suicide by Judy Bousquet

Published in Gainesville Sun December 29, 2005

Every eighteen minutes, someone in the United States dies by suicide. Usually, this type of death remains quite - nothing in the paper and only whispers among family and friends. When someone is famous, those unwritten rules change and we all hear about such a death in the newspaper, radio and TV. Thursday, Tony Dungy and the rest of us learned that his eighteen year-old son, James died by suicide. My heart goes out to him and his family and friends.

I have a pretty good idea of what they are experiencing and will experience over the next couple of years. They will go through months of shock and then more months and years of grief and questioning why and wondering what they could have, should have, would have done, if only they had known. I have come to a place of acceptance of my son's death by suicide, but not for a minute do I stop trying to prevent other families from experiencing this type tragedy, that in many cases is preventable. James Dungy had his entire life in front of him. Most people interviewed who attempt suicide and

live say that they did not want to die, they only wanted to stop the terrible pain they were feeling. Suicide has been called a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

The Surgeon General has studied suicide and issued a report with prevention recommendations. A task force created by the Governor has studied suicide and issued a report with prevention recommendations. We know what to do and it will take a coordinated effort. For the third year in a row, bills have been introduced in the Florida House HB 527 and Senate SB1008 to create a full time Suicide Prevention office and coordinator position under the Governor's office. The bills failed the last two years, not by an up or down vote, but were left to languish in a committee in the House. Passing these bills is critical to implementation of the recommendations by the Surgeon General and Task Force.

In 2004, 2,382 Floridians died by suicide. That is six people a day. James Dungy will become a 2005 Florida statistic. Florida ranks 13th in the nation in suicide. Twice as many people die by suicide than homicide. Almost twice as many people die by suicide than

alcohol related traffic deaths.

Here is what you can do. Call your Representative or Senator and ask them to co-sponsor the above bills. Representative Jennings and Senator Smith co-sponsored the bills the last two years. Representative Cretul did not co-sponsor the bill, although I asked him to. Send this letter to your friends and relatives in Florida and ask them to call their Representatives and senators.

The Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition is a 501(C)(3) non-profit corporation whose goal is to collaborate to develop and implement suicide prevention, intervention and postvention strategies and programs. Join the Coalition or get more information about suicide at www.floridasuicideprevention.org. A complete copy of the task force recommendations is at the above web site.

(Purchase a wristband for \$10 that has the two suicide hotline numbers to call for help, which are 1-800-SUICIDE and 1-800-273-TALK. Both of these numbers connect a person to the closest crisis center in their area. Send a check for \$10 made out to FSPC to Box 357434, Gainesville, FL 32635.)

Getting Rid of Psychiatry Space at Shands is an Act of Stigma *by Bruce Stevens*

"Mental health conditions need to be treated just like other medical conditions by doctors and hospitals."

Published in Gainesville Sun January 1, 2006



The recent shots fired by Miami air marshals have struck the tip of an iceberg that is festering right here in Gainesville and throughout Florida.

Although a White House investigation will try to derive airport security lessons from the incident, equally valuable community and medical school priority lessons must also be learned relating to medical events surrounding the incident.

The delusional passenger, Rigoberto Alpizar, displayed erratic behavior which was perceived as an imminent bomb threat. Air marshals decided to rapidly subdue Alpizar in the light of our national vigilance on airport terrorism.

The tragedy of Alpizar's unnecessary death is compounded by the fact that the events were precipitated by a medical condition that can be treatable and manageable. In his case, it was bipolar disorder (manic depression), which is an unavoidable biomedical disease of brain cells affecting mood, thought and behavior.

All medical conditions deserve adequate treatment in 21st century America, but most people avoid or deny effective treatments for mental illnesses because of prevailing 14th century stigma and ignorance. Even when a potentially successful treatment plan is started, the power of our cultural prejudice shames many people with a mental illness into stopping their medications and talk therapy.

As of this writing, investigators believe Alpizar did not take his bipolar medication in a timely manner.

Bipolar disorder is part of a group of medical conditions that collectively comprise the single largest disease

category negatively impacting our economy and quality of life. The World Health Organization, the World Bank and Harvard University studies reveal that mental illnesses are more disabling in economic markets than all cancers, AIDS and cardiovascular diseases.

By U.S. Surgeon General statistics, over 3 million Floridians have a diagnosable mental illness whose disability impacts the lives of millions more citizens, family members and co-workers.

Stigma within the medical care community itself marginalizes mental illnesses, pushing such diseases into the shadows behind name-brand body illnesses. The magnitude of mental illness disability and its economic impact on society is openly ignored by senior administrators at the University of Florida College of Medicine.

The entire inpatient psychiatric facility in Shands Hospital is currently proposed to be evicted soon in favor of space allocated to somatic (body) medical conditions. Shands revenue would increase under this plan, with one reason being that most insurance policies pay only limited coverage for medical disorders of the brain associated with the mind, compared to somatic (bodily) disorders. Ironically, these are the very insurance policies offered - uncontested - to College of Medicine faculty.

The overall community impact of evicting psychiatry from Shands Hospital would mean that Florida citizens would bear much greater costs in terms of economic burden to businesses, negative impact on quality of life for families and co-workers, impeded advancements in psychiatric clinical research and curtailed training of new doctors needed to treat mental illnesses in Florida.

A greater, even more destructive

message of this eviction is to further propagate the stigma of mental illnesses, in defiance of the U.S. Surgeon General's edict that mental illnesses must be treated with the same urgency as body illnesses and injuries.

National studies show that stigma is the single greatest reason why people with a mental illness do not seek out or receive the effective treatment they deserve.

This propagates the vicious cycle of sustaining lower revenue for psychiatry space within the hospital. A similar vicious cycle occurs for funding biomedical and clinical research of mental diseases.

Although mental illnesses represent the single largest disabling disease category in our state, even prominent elected officials routinely propagate its underclass status. For example, Florida Sen. Durell "Doc" Peaden, chair of Committee on Health Care, has encouraged Florida's Legislature to restrict Medicaid payouts for medications used to treat mental illnesses, with his calloused justification that "Nobody's died that I know of (from a mental illness)."

The Miami airport killing of a man with bipolar disorder was a terrible tragedy that provides many lessons. It can open our eyes to our community's priority of addressing mental illnesses as true medical conditions that should be front and center priorities in the UF College of Medicine, and as common household words.

To learn more about bipolar disorder or any mental illness or brain biomedical condition, visit the Web site of the local affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illnesses (NAMI): www.NamiNorthCentralFlorida.org.

THANK YOUUS ... Many resounding THANK YOUUs and lots of warm gratitude to:



☺ The anonymous donor who paid for the rental fee at the church. We needed a place to gather and celebrate and our donor's generosity provided that.

☺ Everyone who brought goodies to the holiday party. What a delicious feast of holiday treats!

☺ **Bill Donnelly** for leading the musical portion of the evening, to **Lisa Cue** for playing her guitar and to Bill, Lisa and **Kirk Jacobsen** for leading the singing. The music added a lively, entertaining dimension to the gathering.

☺ **Paula Palmer, Joan Stevens Dianne Walsh, and Pat Warnock** and for arriving early to transform the room and create a warm, festive, welcoming atmosphere.

☺ **Michelle and Bill Donnelly, Joan and Bruce Stevens, Osnat and Phillip Teitlebaum, Dianne Walsh and Pat Warnock** for staying afterwards to help with cleanup. All the good company made cleanup fun!

☺ For all of our members who made donations to people who are homeless, many of whom have a mental illness. They were given to many needy and appreciative people. (We will continue to collect items at our meetings throughout the year. Five tents for donation to the Homeless Van were purchased from the **Don Walsh Memorial Fund**.)

☺ Everyone who made a cash donation to defray the cost of drinks and paper goods for the party.

☺ Everyone who came, shared in the holiday spirit and helped nurture the NAMI NCF community that we all benefit from all year long.

☺ New members, **Richard and Lynn Mitchell** for their \$250 donation to NAMI!

☺ **Bruce Stevens** for creating, developing and maintaining our website. The site provides a wealth of information and links to even more info and provides easy email access to which Bruce responds regularly.

☺ **Susan Cary** for scheduling a variety of speakers on an every-other-month basis. She has brought in a variety of guests providing us with helpful information and creating community connections.

☺ **Pat Warnock** for wisely handling our finances. Pat writes checks and is doing research into how to best handle our funds. Thanks also for checking our NAMI post office box for mail on a weekly basis.

☺ **Paula Palmer** for taking minutes at board meetings. We rely on Paula's recording when we forget what we decided.

☺ **Susan Boulet, Beth Foley, Paula Palmer, and Dianne Skye** for teaching the Family-to-Family course, offering valuable info to people searching for information. Each one attended an intensive training session and dedicates their time and expertise for 12 consecutive weeks.

☺ **Rob and Sharon Kain** (son and daughter-in-law of Don and Dianne Walsh) for funding our Family-to-Family classes in memory of Rob's brother, **Jeffrey Kain**, who lost his life to mental illness.

☺ **Civitan Regional Blood Center** for providing the space for the Family-to-Family classes to meet.

☺ **Steffany Osborne** for leading the peer-to-peer group for consumers. She approached NAMI, took the intensive training and is now leading a well attended CARE group for consumers twice a month.

☺ **Shands at Vista** for graciously providing space for both our monthly NAMI meetings and for our twice-a-month CARE peer-to-peer meetings.

☺ **Dianne Walsh** for putting together our monthly newsletter. This involves helping co-presidents Joan and Bruce Stevens writing and collecting article contributions, formatting the articles and announcements, taking it to the printer, folding, labeling and then getting them to Meridian Behavioral Center for mailing. Every month!

☺ **Meridian Behavioral Center** for mailing out the newsletter each month, donating the cost of postage.

☺ **Dorothy Davenport** for answering phone calls to our NAMI phone number. She is often the first contact with our organization for people looking for info or help.

☺ **Marianne and Chuck Debolt, Bernice Best, Lillian Cason and Judy Bousquet** for acting as liaisons to related organizations, providing exposure and keeping information flowing.

☺ **Michelle Donnelly** for taking over as librarian. She keeps tabs on materials that have been checked out and lugs the collection to and from each monthly meeting.

☺ **Sharon Schreiber** for listing our monthly meetings in the Sunday Gainesville Sun thus reaching out to the whole community.

☺ Everyone who has written a letter to the editor or a Speaking Out column. You are facilitating an ongoing community wide discussion of the many issues around mental illnesses, thus chipping away at the granite-like stigma our loved ones live with.

NAMI FLORIDA

We were very pleased to have Sue Homant, Executive Director of NAMI Florida, as the speaker at the January meeting. She spoke to us about the mission of NAMI Florida.

- Education & Training
- Information & Referral
- Consumer Outreach, and
- Advocacy & Public Awareness

She also spoke of the first annual statewide NAMI walk which will occur Tuesday, April 4, this year in Tallahassee in the "shadow of the capital." Check out the NAMI Florida website for more information: <http://www.namifl.org/>

confused thoughts bizarre ideas socially withdrawn

DOES THIS SOUND LIKE YOUR TEEN?

Your child may suffer from schizophrenia or another mental disorder. Symptoms include hallucinations, delusions, social withdrawal, disorganized speech and difficulty organizing thoughts.

Your teen may be eligible to participate in a research study. Participants must be 13 to 17 years of age and generally healthy. Those who qualify will receive study-related mental health assessments, physical exams, lab services and an investigational medication or placebo (inactive substance).

For more information, contact:

Nikki Ricciuti, RN 352-392-8316 University of Florida

E-mails Issues for NAMI Members

Several e-mails are routinely being returned as "undeliverable". The problem is usually an invalid e-mail address, full e-mail mailbox, or other rejection by your server. Several e-mail addresses have been scribbled quickly on the sign-in sheet at NAMI meetings, and these unreadable addresses are often a problem.

✿ If you have not receive any e-mail from co-president Bruce Stevens in the past month, please send an quickie notice by email to:

FIX@naminorthcentralflorida.org.

Put the word "FIX NAMI" in the "Subject" line.

✿ If you want to be removed from all future e-mails from NAMI North Central Florida or from Bruce, please send a note to:

REMOVE@naminorthcentralflorida.org.

Put the word "REMOVE NAMI" in the "Subject" line.

✿ If you would like to be added to our affiliate e-mail list, or if you are not sure whether you are on the list, send a note to:

ADD@naminorthcentralflorida.org.

Put the word "ADD NAMI" in the "Subject" line.

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.



John Nash

John Nash, Nobel Prize Winner in mathematics, has faced a lifelong battle with schizophrenia. In 1958, on the threshold of his career, Nash got struck by this disease. He lost his job at M.I.T. in 1959 (he had been tenured there in 1958 - at the age of 29) and was virtually incapacitated by the disease for the next two decades or so. He roamed about Europe and America, finally, returning to Princeton where he became a sad, ghostly character on the campus - "the Phantom of Fine Hall" as Rebecca Goldstein described him in her novel, "*Mind-Body Problem*."

The disease began to evaporate in the early 1970s and Nash began to gradually to return to his work in mathematics. However, Nash himself associated his madness with his living on an "ultralogical" plane, "breathing air too rare" for most mortals, and if being "cured" meant he could no longer do any original work at that level, then, Nash argued, a remission might not be worthwhile in the end. His struggle was well documented in the book "*A Beautiful Mind*," by Sylvia Nash which was later made into a movie by the same name.

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<http://www.naminorthcentralflorida.org>

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CARE Leader

Steff Osborne

**NAMI North Central Florida
 Membership Application**

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

Telephone Number _____

Email Address _____

Mail to Pat Warnock, 5424 SW 91st Terrace, Gainesville, FL 32608. Checks should be made payable to NAMI North Central Florida.

Membership (Voting)

_____ Individual or Family (\$35)

Membership (Non-Voting)

_____ Organizations (\$50 or more)