

What is NAMI NC (or any affiliate of NAMI)?

Here's an answer from a caring person who lives NAMI every day.

By Gloria Harrison



People are attacking NAMI NC - but, I don't think they understand what it really is.

As the Helpline Manager I am often asked on the phone, "What is NAMI NC?"

I give the correct answer that we are a private non profit which provides education, support and advocacy. And, of course, we are. I gradually dole out information to them about regarding what they might need so as not to overwhelm. We offer so many free programs, such as Family to Family, which is trained family members teaching other family members about mental illness and how to cope with and advocate for their loved ones. We provide Basics, which is a class for parents of younger children. Peer to Peer teaches consumers of mental health services about their illnesses and how to advocate for themselves and to prepare for a potential future episode. In Our Own Voice offers persons with mental illness an opportunity to speak to groups in the community about their journey through recovery and beyond. NAMI on Campus gives students an outlet to reach out to interested parties and provide information, awareness and hope regarding mental illness. There is also special outreach to Veterans and training and Connection groups for persons living with mental illness every day.

But, asking "What is NAMI NC?" is almost a lol – laugh out loud moment. After being here for over 22 years, I am not sure I understand everything that NAMI NC is. The following is my understanding:

NAMI is parents of a teenager who have had to have their child committed to the hospital 6 times in one year. They desperately seek services for him and other children in the community and at school.

NAMI is two elderly parents, afraid to sleep at night, with their dresser pulled in front of the bedroom door because their son is up, talking to himself and raging through the house. They have tried to have him committed, but the emergency room doctor does not see the need.

NAMI is a mother who has lost one son to suicide and has another who engages in such reckless behavior that she could live on pins and needles. Yet, she deals with her grief by serving her NAMI group and helping persons with mental illness in her community.

NAMI is a consumer who has dealt with the anguish of major depression for most of his life and attempted suicide several times. When he is able, he attends his local meetings and in a quiet voice has raised the issue of others living in group homes and worries about what will happen to them in the future. He wants NAMI to advocate for them.

NAMI is a young girl who has schizophrenia and is an artist of the highest caliber. She shares the beauty of her work and her recovery with others in lectures and presentations.

NAMI is people whose families have completely blamed them for what has happened to them. So, they have sought out another family - a NAMI family – to support them.

NAMI is the couple whose idea of a fun Saturday is to distribute brochures about mental illness to local libraries.

NAMI is a man who was beaten when he was in a psychiatric hospital, and fought through the legal system until he found some justice.

NAMI is a family member who ignores an insult at a meeting (because we are all human) and says, "Today, I am here for ME!"

NAMI is a family member who puts their own heartache aside for a moment and responds to the tears of another and says, "Today, I am here for YOU!"

NAMI is a woman who shows up at every County Commissioner meeting.

NAMI is a young girl whose formerly raging schizophrenia is under control with medication and now is active in her local Connection support group who says, "I want an awesome life."