

# Round UP

## FOR NAMI (NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS) NE IOWA

May is Mental Health Awareness Month



### Northeast Iowa

Oneota Co-op shoppers are invited to “Round Up at the Register” for NAMI Northeast Iowa Monday, May 15 through Monday, May 29. This event is scheduled to coincide with Mental Health Awareness Month. Each May, NAMI works with other organizations to “fight stigma, provide support, educate the public and advocate for policies that support the millions of people in the U.S. affected by mental illness.” This year’s theme is #MoreThanEnough. Each individual, despite diagnosis, appearance, socioeconomic status background or ability is “More Than Enough” and deserving of support, resources, fulfillment and a caring community. Learn more about NAMI, and our local chapter, in this Co-op Q&A:

#### **OCC: When was NAMI founded? How about our local chapter?**

**NAMI NEIA:** NAMI National was birthed at a kitchen table in Madison, Wisconsin in 1977. Parents of children challenged by mental health conditions were frustrated that their children were misunderstood and under-served by medical, educational and social structures. They were committed to advocating for both their children and their families. The movement grew very quickly; by 1979, it became a national effort. The organization’s current name, National Alliance on Mental Illness, was adopted in 1997.

Locally, the Northeast Iowa Peace & Justice Center, alongside Families First, received a 2014 grant from the Winneshiek Medical Center Foundation. This contribution facilitated the creation of our local chapter. NAMI Northeast Iowa became an official NAMI affiliate in 2017; efforts are focused on Allamakee, Clayton, Fayette, Howard and Winneshiek counties.

#### **OCC: Could you please share the organization’s mission statement?**

**NAMI NEIA:** NAMI Northeast Iowa exists to provide education, support, and advocacy for all people affected by mental illness in our member counties. We work collaboratively with our state and national affiliates and with other stakeholders to improve the quality of life for individuals and communities.

#### **OCC: What resources may individuals find at NAMI Northeast Iowa?**

**NAMI NEIA:** Our local team is currently focusing on support groups and educational programs. A powerful portion of this work is that NAMI leaders bring a personal understanding of mental illness with them. Our leaders are well-trained volunteers whose mission is to advocate, educate, and support those living with mental illness symptoms and their loved ones and caregivers. NAMI nationally has many excellent programs and educational resources regarding mental health to draw upon. Visit <https://namineiowa.org/> for more information regarding available programs. Individuals may email [namineiowa@gmail.com](mailto:namineiowa@gmail.com), follow us on FB or call (563) 293-6264. Please note that NAMI support groups are not meant to replace professional treatment but do provide an additional valuable resource. Those in crisis may find help 24/7 at 988 (National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline).



**Pictured, l to r: NAMI Northeast Iowa Family Support Group leaders Susan Friedrich and Shannon Brown.**

The two support groups being re-energized in 2023 are the Connection Recovery Support Group and the Family Support Group. The Connection Recovery Support Group is designed to support anyone suffering from symptoms of mental illness. Well-trained volunteer leaders, who themselves have lived experience of mental health challenges, facilitate the group in a carefully structured format. This group meets weekly in Decorah.

Our Family Support Group is for the family members and loved ones of people who are living with mental health challenges. Family members also need support in their role as caregiver or partner when a loved one experiences a mental health concern. As with all NAMI programs, the facilitators of this group are specifically trained volunteer leaders who have lived experience with a family member who has encountered mental illness. These meetings are held monthly in Elgin.

Two educational efforts currently emphasized are the In Our Own Voice presentation and our NAMI booth at some of the local county fairs. In Our Own Voice is a program where two individuals with lived experience of mental health challenges share personal stories. The purpose of this presentation is to raise awareness of mental illness and diminish stereotypes which may include the belief that people with mental illness are disabled, homeless or institutionalized. This program demonstrates that the person next to you - appearing well - actually may be living with a mental illness. This program has been welcomed by social services provider groups, civic groups, churches, mediation groups, education providers and law enforcement. This furthers our goals of community awareness and education.



Our fair booth provides a place to reduce stigma about mental health and pick up NAMI educational resources. Last year, the “Meet Little Monster” coloring book was a resource we distributed to fair-goers. Other educational programs for family members, caregivers, and those who wish to learn more about supporting those living with mental illness include the Family to Family and Hope for Recovery coursework.

**OCC: What may we, as individuals, do to participate in destigmatizing mental illness?**

**NAMI NEIA:** Our first priority regarding mental illness is that people will be able to reach out and find the care that is needed when they are experiencing a mental health concern. It could be that a person you know, work with or live with needs to hear you say that it’s ok for them to find care. If they are in crisis, they need to know that it’s ok to call 988 to talk to someone who will help them. As more people are able to recognize and

communicate that both mental health and physical health are health components, more barriers are removed that prevent people from getting the help they need. Legislative advocacy for adequate mental health care access also has a role in removing stigma.

**OCC: How is the organization funded?**

**NAMI NEIA:** Even though NAMI programs are free, they do have expenses. Your donations support the training of our volunteers and the purchasing of our educational materials. Our funding comes from memberships, donations and grants. To donate, visit <https://namineiowa.org/donate>; to become a member, visit <https://namineiowa.org/how-to-join> and be sure to select NAMI Northeast Iowa. We greatly appreciate the community’s partnership in the work we do.

*Oneota Co-op round up campaigns are intrinsically tied to the Co-op’s community service commitment as outlined in the Co-op Missions and Ends statement. Co-op shoppers are provided the opportunity to round up to the nearest dollar to support this organizational end, which reads as follows:*

*Oneota Community Co-op Organizational End number seven: “Our members are diverse and engaged, working together and sharing time, energy, and resources to build a resilient and thriving local community.”*

*Co-op Q&A by Tanya O’Connor*