



# GRASSROOTS

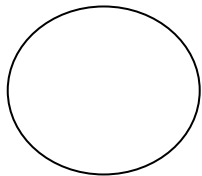
NAMI is the National Alliance on Mental Illness  
Newsletter of NAMI Huntsville, a grassroots affiliate of NAMI Alabama and NAMI

## President's Corner

### Veterans and Mental Health

By Annie Saylor

We longtime NAMI members don't need today's headlines to know that mental health services to our veterans need much improvement. We've heard the stories of families of veterans in our support group meetings; we've advocated on their behalf.



Many veterans of the war in Iraq need help for post-traumatic stress syndrome, and I'm sure that a few veterans require treatment for other disorders that

emerged during their military service. It is not unusual, given the age at which schizophrenia symptoms begin, for some soldiers to be afflicted with this brain illness as well.

NAMI reaches out to veterans and organizations that serve veterans, at the state and national level. NAMI Alabama is presently working with Gov Riley's Operation Grateful Heart (OGH) representatives and with the Still Serving Veterans (SSV) organization to improve mental health services for veterans. Operation Grateful Heart helps coordinate assistance offered by state agencies with local volunteer-driven projects. Information on this service can be found at <http://dir.alabama.gov/OGHInfoSheet.pdf>

As described on their website, Still Serving Veterans (<http://www.stillservingveterans.org>) has a goal of developing the Huntsville/RSA Community of Excellence Support Network (vet/spouse/family, medical accommodation prescription, career assistance, business partners, entrepreneurial ops, etc). They seek to Prioritize, Negotiate, and Match the employment and quality of life goals of the Wounded Veteran/spouse and accommodate the skills, interests, and abilities within the Huntsville business community. SSV also wants to build awareness and implement communication strategies to recruit Veterans and families sharing 'lessons learned' and become the model for other communities to follow.

NAMI Huntsville representatives Jack Little and I have connected with SSV. On June 6, I supported a

"Veterans to Work" event held by SSV and OGH in which volunteers assisted veterans with resume review, practice interviews, and advice regarding job searches in the Huntsville area.

Our speaker this month is Laura Ayers from SSV; be sure to attend to learn more about them and how NAMI Huntsville can be of assistance to veterans.

-Annie ([saylorav@yahoo.com](mailto:saylorav@yahoo.com))



## Veterans: A Critical Concern

Report Reprinted from NAMI.org, June 25, 2007

More Vietnam veterans have died from suicide since the war ended than the approximately 55,000 soldiers who were killed directly during the conflict in the 1960s.

Loud gasps were heard from the audience when U.S. Representative Bob Filner, chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, offered this statistic while speaking before the annual convention of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in San Diego. Congressman Filner spoke during the last day of the convention, June 23.

Filner called mental health professions, schools, churches, employers, and other community leaders to provide support to returning service men and women, and encourage them to start with education about mental illnesses.

His remarks come at a time when strong concerns have been voiced about the Pentagon's mental health care system and policies as well as VA treatment.

Immediately before Filner's remarks, the *Hartford Courant* of Connecticut received NAMI's Outstanding Media Award for investigative reporting for a series of stories last year which revealed that soldiers with post-traumatic stress (*Cont'd next page, see "Concern"*)

**(Concern)**

disorder were being sent to the front lines in Iraq while taking medications for this illness but without receiving counseling or monitoring as part of their overall treatment. The series sparked Congressional hearings and was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize earlier this year.

During a convention session on mental healthcare reform within the VA system, Thomas Horvath, M. D., Chief of staff for the VA Medical Center in Houston, Texas, for professor of psychiatry at Baylor College of Medicine, identified a “balanced scorecard” for reform that included the following:

- Access to care
- Quality of clinical care
- Veteran satisfaction
- Function and quality of life
- Community relations
- Employee growth and satisfaction.

What is missing is recovery, he noted. There is no specific definition.

Measurements also are not always connected. For example, the quality of care may be high, but satisfaction low.

Describing reforms that have occurred in recent years, John Bradley, a consultant to NAMI’s National Veterans Council, said, “The system is really exhausted right now”, with turnovers in leadership reflecting almost a “panic”.

Horvath estimated that only about 15 percent of medical professionals in the VA system are committed to reform and providing leadership for it. About 50 percent are going it alone but not providing leadership. The remainder is either reluctant to reform or “dead-set against it.”

## **Veterans Living With Severe Mental Illness**

*Information excerpted from NAMI.org, June 2007*

About 20% of VA patients need mental health (MH) treatment and VA MH spending has decreased by 8% over the past five years. The *Independent Budget* estimates that simply to achieve parity, the VA should be devoting an additional \$478 million to MH spending. The *Independent Budget* recommends the Congress should incrementally augment funding for veterans with serious MI by \$160 million each year from FY 2002 through FY 2004.

**NAMI believes** that veterans should receive the same full range of integrated services within the hospital and upon discharge to the community that are received by other people with brain disorders. NAMI calls for veteran’s hospitals and outpatient treatment programs to be held to the same standards of performance as all other hospitals and treatment programs.

## **Events Calendar**

All NAMI Huntsville Meetings are held in The United Way Building  
701 Andrew Jackson Way, Huntsville,  
Unless otherwise announced.



### **Entire Month of August**

Capitol *Showcase*

Consumer Art Exhibition  
At the Alabama State Capitol  
Montgomery

### **Tuesday, August 7**

7:00pm – Support Group  
Facilitator: Bill Chew

### **Tuesday, August 21**

6:00pm – Board Meeting  
7:00pm - Ed Program  
Laura Ayers, Still Serving Veterans  
Topic: Veteran’s Mental Health

### **Friday – Sunday, August 24 – 26**

NAMI AL Conference  
Montgomery

### **Tuesday, September 4**

7:00pm – Support Group  
Facilitator: Ruth Karr

### **Tuesday, September 18**

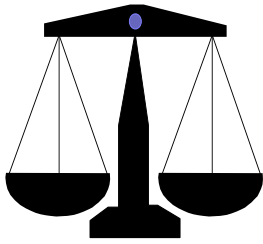
6:00pm – Board Meeting  
7:00pm – Education Program

### **Every Thursday**

6:00pm - Bipolar DBSA\* Support Group  
In the United Way Bldg.

Contact: Tony Martin, 313-0633

\*Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance Affiliate



## A Great Day in Municipal Mental Health Court

Ruth Karr, NAMI MHC,  
Family Advocate

On July 6 the Municipal MH Court session was very encouraging to all parties involved. Most program clients were in their seats before 10:00 am, waiting. Each participant was called by Judge Sybil Cleveland to report on keeping up treatment orders--taking meds, keeping appointments, behaviors with family, etc. The MH Center's treatment monitor, Tammy Leeth, and families present, gave Judge Cleveland positive reports, except for one client.

Then came graduation time; we could hardly wait! Some clients scheduled to graduate were all dressed up, with broad smiles, and ready to be photographed with Judge Cleveland when their program completion certificates were presented. Two graduates have co-occurring disorders, have had setbacks, and had been in the program a very long time. Both were finally ready to finish the program, but not treatment, they promised. Judge Cleveland has a wonderful a tradition to conclude the ceremonies. Each graduate is asked to say whatever they wish to those still in the program, and to attending families. It is so heartening to hear their wise and encouraging remarks!

After pictures are made and each graduate leaves the courtroom, I often follow them into the corridor to congratulate and to tell them how much better they look and seem. I offer them the same NAMIH information kits that I earlier had provided their families. They may even get a special "NAMI Hug" from me. I urge them to stay in treatment, but to keep their info kits close by, and to read them again and again if they are tempted to leave treatment without MH professional advice.

There were some great words of wisdom and encouragement from graduate Sylvia Timmons Rennicks, and a special poem she read aloud to Judge Cleveland. This was followed by enthusiastic applause for Sylvia and her black-robed angel! Thanks, Sylvia, for letting NAMI reprint your wise words and poem in *Grassroots*.

NOTE: See Sylvia's poem, "I Met an Angel;" on page 4.

## Words of Encouragement

- Never beat yourself up over past mistakes, for while you are doing so, you are robbing yourself of strength and energy you will need for tomorrow's victories.
- I can admire a man that falls a 1,000 times and gets back up to try again, more so than a man who has lived a 1,000 years and in the end says "For what?" That man never accomplished a thing.
- It is better to see yourself as a champion that had a few losses than to see yourself as a loser who will never be a champion. For us, being a champion could be as simple as getting to a place of stability, staying on our medicines and keeping our doctor and therapist appointments.
- Do the right thing at home, school, work or wherever you are. Pat yourself on the back! Reward yourself. It may be as simple as going out for an ice cream, or any little thing
- I pride myself as being an asset to everyone I meet, more so than being a liability. Some people are going to try to pull you down, or cause you to get off course, so you have to stay away from them. Keep a positive attitude, and ***Don't ever lose hope!***

## Local NAMIH News

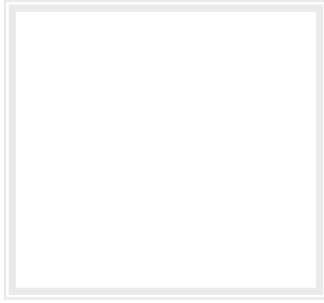
**Volunteer Appreciation Coffee Held:** On Thursday, July 26 at the NAMIH office. About 15 guests attended a coffee for NAMI office volunteers. They enjoyed a light lunch and time to visit and "talk shop". Since office volunteers work on different days not all of them know each other. The coffee allowed all to meet and get acquainted.

**NAMI Alabama Statistics:** NAMI Alabama has 16 affiliates in the state. Their collective membership totals 760 members.

**Our Place Has Moved** from their little house on O'Shaughnessy Blvd. to 205 Max Luther Drive. Their new phone number is: 256.746.4145. They are open Monday – Friday. For hours open, activities or other information about their program call Our Place.



# I Met an Angel



## City Judge Sybil Cleveland

I met an angel; she did not have her wings spread,  
nor was she wearing a halo.

I met an angel; She was wearing a black robe.

She gave me the chance to restore my good name.  
Now I can go on to pursue fortune and fame.

A God-given vision Mental Health Court is,  
It causes me to triumph and shed happy tears.

As I travel throughout the earth, Helping people realize  
their self-worth, I'll often think of my angel wearing a black robe.  
She will be my silent inspirations I travel the globe.

Sometimes I'll pull away just to say a little prayer,  
That God will always keep her in His care.

For my angel did not spread her wings,  
nor did she wear a halo.  
She just walked as a woman of great beauty,  
kindheartedness, wisdom and integrity.

Yes, it was Judge Sybil Cleveland wearing a black robe.  
You are truly one in a million among all Judges!

**-by Sylvia Timmons Rennicks**



Join NAMI Huntsville or renew your Membership.

Family: \$25/yr or Individual: \$20/yr.

Mail check payable to: NAMIH, 701 Andrew Jackson Way, Huntsville AL 35801  
Membership is not required to receive NAMIH services, but is greatly appreciated!

## G R A S S R O O T S

### Official Newsletter of NAMI Huntsville

701 Andrew Jackson Way, Huntsville AL 35801  
256.534.2628

Published monthly except January.

Distributed free to NAMIH Members and Mental  
Health professionals, to public by their request.

**President:** Annie Saylor

**Editor:** Nancy Dudney

**Deadline:** Third Wednesday of month preceding  
publication. Submit news, announcements, and  
articles. Article word-limit 250.

Submit to: [hsvnami@hiwaay.net](mailto:hsvnami@hiwaay.net)

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
HUNTSVILLE, AL  
PERMIT # 31