



NAMI Connection Mission Statement: There will be a NAMI Connection recovery support group within reasonable traveling distance for every person in America who lives with mental illness, every day of the week.

Testing...Testing....1,2,3!

On Oct. 25, Connection launched its first online support group meeting using Skype technology. The online pilot was initiated with the goal of bringing Connection to people living in rural areas, people without reliable transportation to and from group meetings and those with social anxieties or other illnesses which prevent them from taking part in live group meetings. With the help of an Internet connection, a microphone and a webcam, the people participating in our pilot group are able to benefit from Connection’s proven peer support model.

The pilot was hosted by two facilitators, Tom Rundall from Nebraska and June McWilliams from Colorado, as well as Connection Field Specialist Gretchen Anglin. Seven participants volunteered to sit in on the first call. Since the first meeting, there have been weekly test runs, which will conclude on Nov. 29. Our initial findings indicate that the Connection model does indeed work in a virtual environment, The participants formed a quick bond, even though they had never seen each other in person. We will analyze the results of our test run this month, as well as investigate a variety of video conferencing services to determine which one best suits Connection’s technological and confidentiality needs.

As the mission of the Connection program states, we hope to make a group meeting available every day of the week to every person in America living with mental illness. Live Connection meetings have proven to be a successful model for recovery support; an online venue will make Connection accessible to more people than ever before.

Testimonials

“A few years ago, I was in internal pain that I didn’t understand but had become unbearable. I had been around AA, so I checked the local free paper and saw a mental health support group called Connection (I couldn’t believe people living with mental illness would talk about it in front of others). I quietly went to the meeting not wanting anyone to know I was being treated for mental health. I heard people talk about mental illness, symptoms, treatments and how they were dealing with mental illness in their lives. I watched them support each other. Just listening to people talk about something I had been experiencing for years was a shock. I didn’t know anything about mental illness. The day I walked into that room was the first day of my recovery. I had a lot to learn but found the comfort and support that I dearly needed. Today I facilitate two Connection groups and try to attend a few others. I find the principles of support as a source of strength. When in certain situations, they come to my mind and help me to ground myself. As a facilitator, I have had the privilege of watching others come through the door and take their first steps in recovery. I think the most important part of Connection is knowing someone else has been there and the enormous affect that support can have on each of us”

-Anonymous



Coordinator Spotlight: Christi Collins

What is your current role in the Connection program in your state? My current role in the NAMI Connection program in Alabama is as state coordinator, state trainer and group facilitator.



What are some innovative things you are doing with Connection? Because this program is so needed throughout the state, I have made an effort to increase the number of groups by recently training to be a state trainer along with Adele Morgan and Sara Parfait from Alabama. With our group efforts, we intend to double our number of support groups after our next training in December.

What do you like best about Connection? The thing I love best about Connection is the amount of peer support one can receive from attending a group. Even as a facilitator I come away from every group with more knowledge and insight about my mental illness.

Tell us a little about you. What are some of your favorite hobbies or past times? Some of my favorite hobbies are reading, gardening, Zumba classes and, most of all, being with all my pets.

Tell us one goal you wish to accomplish. One goal I hope to achieve is to be able to give back and help others who live with mental illness. I have received a great amount of support that has led to my recovery, and I want the same for others. I believe everyone living with mental illness can have a rich and fulfilling life with the right support.

Want to share a positive Connection thought? Please e-mail testimonials to connection@nami.org

Program Progress

- Facilitator Trainings: 177
- Facilitators Trained: 2,544
- Support Groups: 521

For more information on the NAMI Connection program, please visit www.nami.org/connection or call the HelpLine at 1 (800) 950-NAMI .



Facilitator Spotlight: Charan Bird

What is your current role in the Connection program in your state? My current role in the Connection program is that I am a co-facilitator going on three years or more. I have also been one of three Washington state trainers for Connection for about two years. I have used the available mental health services here in Lakewood, Wash. for many years. I have taken advantage of all conferences and trainings that I could. My first class was in leadership; my second was to become a WRAP facilitator, which I have done at the agency for five years now. I then went on and took training to become certified peer specialist, which I have done now for four years in the spring. My "passion" is working with my peers! I am secretary for NAMI Pierce County, serving for three years, and have been a member since the late '90s.



What are some innovative things you are doing with Connection? One thing that was a challenge to me was keeping our NAMI Connection support group alive when my co-facilitator could no longer keep her commitment to facilitate the group. When our first meeting place went out of business, I relocated to Greater Lakes Mental Health Center. I did everything on public transit, the resource table and my charts, everything. I ran the support group by myself for over a year and a half. Thankfully, I found two loyal friends who agreed to take the training in order to be my co-facilitators last summer. There has been a wonderful change since my co-facilitator Karen came on board. She lifted the whole group up and has given it what I could never have done on my own. Our resource table is brimming with all kinds of new information and has given us new life. She has donated a lot of her time and resources to even serve coffee, teas and goodies. What a team we are! We had 14 participants in our last meeting, the most ever!

What do you like best about Connection? What I enjoy the most about Connection (besides all the wonderful peers I work with) are the monthly recorded facilitator calls. Between my work and volunteer hours, I am not able to sit in on any of the scheduled conference calls. So I look forward to the recorded call at the end of each month. Even though I cannot talk, I listen and learn a lot about how all of us have the same challenges and/or issues. Thanks for this great resource!

Tell us a little about you. What are some of your favorite hobbies or past times? My hobbies are many, now that I love being alive. I love children (though I have none), I cook, read and thrive on pet therapy with my nine year old "Miss Kitty."

Tell us one goal you wish to accomplish. Being from Alaska, I am excited to know there are Connection groups up there. My goal is to do all that I can with/for my peers here in Pierce County. Now that state funds are being cut back so deeply, my hope is that in my later years (just a few away), I can return home to Ketchikan, Alaska, and begin a Connection group up there. That is where all my family is, as is my heart! Recovery rocks!

Virginia Welcomes Five New Connection Facilitators!

NAMI Virginia recently welcomed five new facilitators to the Connection team. The facilitators were trained on Oct. 30-31 in Hampton, Va. The two-day training was hosted by NAMI Virginia's Hampton/Newport News Affiliate.

We are sure these new facilitators will make a great addition to the Virginia Connection team, congrats!



Congratulations!

NAMI Florida's Lee County affiliate now holds Connection recovery support group meetings **five days a week!** The Lee County affiliate serves the cities of Fort Myers, Cape Coral, Bonita Springs, North Fort Myers and LeHigh Acres, with meetings in Fort Myers and Cape Coral. Congratulations to NAMI Florida, Lee County group facilitators and the Lee County affiliate!



Tips and Tricks for Coping with the Holiday Season

The holiday season does not magically banish all reasons for feeling sad and lonely; sometimes holidays can seem to magnify those feelings. It can be a little easier to get through the holidays when you look for things to appreciate and focus your thoughts on those positive things. Here are some useful tips to help you enjoy this holiday season.



- Stay close to family and friends who understand your illness.
- Take your medications as prescribed. Be sure to get the sleep you need.
- Celebrate the holidays in ways that are comfortable for you.
- The holiday season does not stop feelings of sadness and loneliness. Give yourself permission to work through these feelings.
- Don't compare this season with previous ones. Enjoy all the little things you have now.
- Talk about the stress you feel with family and friends.
- Do something nice for someone else. Do something nice for yourself.
- Don't dwell on past losses.
- Do work through unresolved grief.
- Do remember that there will be a difference between the ideal holiday image and the reality of one's life. Try not to dwell on any disappointment you may experience.
- Don't accept the role of victim – get out of the house if you can and enjoy the sunshine (when you have it) and fresh air.
- Remember, celebrations are what you make them – and make them comfortable for you. Create new (comfortable) memories.



Monthly Facilitator Calls

Conference call number: 1 (888) 858-6021
Conference Pass code: 4294442760

Facilitators are welcome on all calls, just pick the time and date that works best with your schedule!

December Facilitator Call Schedule

Dec. 2 at 7 p.m.	Dec. 7 at 1 p.m.
Dec. 8 at 4 p.m.	Dec. 16 at 7 p.m.
Dec. 21 at 1 p.m.	Dec. 22 at 4 p.m.

Upcoming Trainings

- Dec. 3-5: NYC-Metro
- Dec. 3-5: Montgomery, Ala.
- Dec. 3-5: Montpelier, Vt.
- Dec. 10-12: Philadelphia, Pa.
- Dec. 10-12: Riverside, Calif.

2011 Trainings

- Jan. 7-9: Baltimore, Md.
- Feb. 4-6: Topeka, Kan.
- Feb. 11-13: Waycross, Ga.
- March 4-5: Little Rock, Ark.
- April 9-10: Raleigh, N.C.



NAMI Connection is on Facebook

Check us out!!

<http://www.facebook.com/thenamiconnection>

We want to thank everyone who has become a fan of NAMI Connection on Facebook — we have now reached 700 people who “like” us! Some great testimonials, up-to-date program information and fan photos can be found on the site...

Do YOU Like NAMI Connection?

Have you had any recent **recognition events** in your community for NAMI Connection facilitators and/or trainers? Let us know so we can spotlight the event in one of our upcoming newsletters! E-mail connection@nami.org.