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Executive Director's Report

TERRY L. RUSSELL



After 18 months apart, the NAMI Ohio Board of Directors met in person for the first time at Deer Creek State Park. There is no way to adequately express the feeling in the room during these meetings.

Each of the 26 members in attendance, who represent every part of the state of Ohio, arrived ready to discuss not only the service needs of their loved ones but, more importantly, to develop a specific advocacy direction that will ensure their loved ones get the care they need.

The first two hours of the meeting was a round table discussion on how the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on those living with mental illness and their families. You could feel the pain, the frustration, and the bewilderment that some of these board members had gone through while trying to care for their not only for their own mental illness but also for their family members.

The words that were spoken during this meeting were so different than the words we hear in daily conversations within the professional mental health system. The board members recognized that the pandemic had affected everyone's life in some negative way. They talked about the social turmoil and social injustice in our communities, the news surrounding Afghanistan, the current political divide, and many other unpleasant things happening in our communities. But, it was this discussion that allowed the members of the board to have the opportunity to put aside all of these other issues and focus on the mental health care that is so desperately needed.

Former Senator Bob Spada told everyone that we need to be clear on what we want to be changed, but more importantly, we cannot wait for the system to change. We must scream our positions to anyone that will listen until change occurs.

The first item that was on everyone's mind was the total lack of case management support throughout the pandemic. While discussing case

management, the board members were adamant about how important it is to have someone to guide you through the maze of the mental health system. The Board felt that case management is the most important support the mental health system could provide to their loved ones. But, each board member reported that case management (in every area of the state) was the lowest of priorities of the mental health system. The pay for case managers is among the lowest of any mental health worker and turnover is off the charts. With the current workforce shortage for all mental health positions, case management has been hit the hardest.

It was the decision of our board that we would develop an advocacy position to change the name of case managers to client navigators. We will urge all paying sources to increase the payment for this special service. When possible, we will reject telehealth for navigators and require protected face-to-face meetings (face masks, distancing, etc.). And, maybe the most important part of this discussion was that it would be the navigators' responsibility to link clients with the services they need, not what just happens to be available. Again, we will advocate that significant funds be allocated for this specific use.

This is just one of a number of topics we covered. Others included crisis services, a continuum of housing services, day programs, and, when appropriate, employment programs.

The NAMI Ohio Board of Directors cherishes the doctors, therapists, nurses, and other front-line providers that are our lifeline. But, when our loved ones are ill, the community support system and dealing with everyday life situations must be the priority.

If I had a bottle where I could capture the emotions, the commitment, and the knowledge at this board meeting and sprinkle it throughout our system, we would enhance so many lives that today are lost.

Thank you to the Board of Directors for allowing me to be part of the conscious of Ohio's mental health system.



GOVERNORS LUNCHEON

Gov. Mike DeWine met recently with the NAMI Ohio Executive Board and the Ohio Adult Care Facilities Association to discuss mental health priorities for spending more than \$600 million in COVID-19 relief funds.

The two-hour meeting on Aug. 2 at the Governor's Residence in Bexley allowed NAMI Ohio officials to lay out the organization's advocacy for person-centered care, crisis stabilization units and housing for those with severe, persistent mental illness.

Fairfield Municipal Court Judge Joyce Campbell, president of the NAMI Ohio Board, said the meeting was a "listening session" by Gov. DeWine and his team to hear the organization's priorities. Lori Criss, director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Judith French, head of the Ohio Department of Insurance, also attended.

"The governor seemed incredibly receptive to what we had to say," Judge Campbell said. "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to fundamentally change the mental health system in Ohio that is not working and we know it's not working."

She said NAMI Ohio would like to see mental health funding distributed more like money for the developmentally disabled is now allocated. "Let's not go by what services are available. Let's go by what the person needs."

Sonya Durosini-Etti, operator of Togetherness Family Homes and president of the Ohio Adult Care Facilities Association, said Gov. DeWine was "definitely open to listening to our concerns. He genuinely wants to do something for us."

"I got the feeling he is really concerned. He knows that we need help," said Sonya, who represents hundreds of facilities around Ohio caring for people with severe and persistent mental illness who would otherwise have nowhere to live.

Sonya said the governor emphasized that he called the meeting with NAMI Ohio to gain input on the organization's priorities for use of COVID19 money so he can work with the Ohio Legislature for funding.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS



LATRICE WADDELL

The National Alliance on Mental Illness Ohio welcomes two new state board members - Latrice Waddell of Toledo and Jenny Schoning of Upper Arlington.

The NAMI Ohio Board helps oversee policies, priorities and advocacy and assists Executive Director Terry Russell and the staff.

Latrice is a psychiatric mental health clinical nurse specialist at Unison Health Community Health Center in Toledo, a facility specializing in patients with serious and persistent mental illness. She has been with the agency since 2003.

"I decided at a very young age that I want to specialize in psychiatry after the loss of a loved one," Latrice said.

Jenny, a native of Dayton, studied journalism at Ohio State University and worked in public relations before deciding to stay home and devote time to her marriage and three sons. When two of her sons developed mental illness, Jenny began volunteering with organizations to help those with mental illness and their loved ones.

She now leads a weekly support group for families, works with youth, and trained with law enforcement on crisis intervention. She also works with Melissa's House, an organization that helps renovate community space in facilities treating the mentally ill.

"I'm so excited to meet and work with people who are dedicated to the issue. NAMI is so great at advocacy and helping families," Jenny said.



JENNY SCHONING

WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO...

In most minority communities, there are just a couple places where men and woman feel comfortable talking about their lives and feelings - in barber shops and beauty salons.



They are safe, trusted places.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness Ohio of Franklin County recently teamed up the African American Male Wellness Agency and other organizations to spread the word about mental health issues by engaging barbers and beauticians.

The outreach engaged 2,742 people, including 311 barbers and beauticians in shops through Franklin County and beyond. There were 29 people trained to be mental health advocates. Word was also spread through 15,000 flyers, 500 posters and 250 yard signs promoting the African American Male Wellness which was held Aug. 14 at Livingston Park in Columbus, as well as 24 billboards and 300,000 information cards distributed through the shops.

Rachelle Martin, executive director of NAMI Franklin County, said it is important to put out the message on getting help for mental illness through the community. "The barber shops in the African American community is the trusted place. That's where men go to let their hair down," Rachelle said.

With some startup up from business giant Amazon, the NAMI affiliate was already at work in the minority community where the stigma associated with seeking help for mental illness is felt even more strongly than the community at large. NAMI Ohio also provided funding for the education and outreach program that ran from April through August.

"We don't use mental health jargon," she continued. "We talk about what's going on in our families and where we need families. It takes a village to raise a child and our village has been the beauty and barber shops," Rachelle said.

The outreach was expanded from barber shops to beauty salons which serve as safe meeting places for women.

Rachelle has gone to the same beauty shop for decades, Bridges Unique Hair Boutique, 3842 E. Livingston Ave. Until recently, it was owned by Ruth Bridges who still works there as a hair stylist with 41 years of experience.

For many women, the shop is a "home away from home," Ruth said. "When our customers sit in the chair, they open up and talk about their family problems. We find out about different things about our clients."

Ruth, who is 76, said she has family members with mental health problems and has long suggested that people get professional help, a recommendation that often falls on deaf ears in the way African American community.

"For years, black people have thought that we can handle things like this in our own families," Ruth said. "We don't reach out for help to see a psychiatrist. I think that's getting better but there's still a ways to go."

Rachelle said NAMI Franklin County is looking into their next steps in reaching out to the minority community because of the success in barber shops and beauty salons. A men's support groups and counseling service is being planned.

"It exceeded my expectations. I want to stay connected with them through other projects," she said.





MAKING THE CALL

Laurel Seeley was slipping away. Blind and plagued by a host of physical and mental health problems, the Columbus woman's world was "very small" – and shrinking daily.

Half a continent away, in Seattle, Washington, her sister, Karen Seeley, was increasingly worried about Laurel who had schizoaffective disorder and steadfastly resisted getting the additional care that Karen thought she needed. In their phone conversations, Karen began picking up suicidal thoughts from her sister – clear distress signals. But what could she do 2,000 miles away? "I did not know where to start," Karen said, "but I knew about NAMI."

Her call to NAMI Ohio's Helpline proved helpful to Laurel and to her sister. While the rest of Laurel's life did not last long – she died in the hospital about eight months after Karen's initial call – her life was more comfortable in the end. She was 63.

Karen spent the last day of her sister's life sitting next to her hospital bed holding her hand. After her sister's death, Karen decided to honor her life with a generous donation to NAMI Ohio of a significant amount of stock from a trust fund established for Laurel by their parents.

NAMI Ohio Executive Director Terry Russell said, "Although this gift is significant, I am more grateful that Karen's sister, Laurel, will be remembered every time a scholarship is offered or someone in need is helped."

"The miracle of NAMI is when families reach out for help in their time of need and a relationship develops that contributes to the greater good of all those living with this mean illness."

When Karen reached out to NAMI in September 2020, she was at her wit's end. Laurel was in failing physical and mental health and absolutely refused outside help, even from her family. Luckily, the person answering the crisis line that day was Jody Demo-Hodgins, NAMI Ohio's then-Director of Children's Services and a long-time veteran of

the mental health system. Now retired, Jody remembers the call – and dozens more calls and emails that followed.

"My primary role was to help and support a family member who was trying help a loved one," Jody said of her months-long effort to assist Karen to get help for her sister, ultimately by going to probate court and eventually becoming her guardian.

Karen likewise remembers the calls with Jody vividly.

"I finally had an advocate who knew what I should do," Karen said in a video statement she made for the NAMI Ohio Board's annual meeting earlier this year. "She taught me how the system works...She listened and understood me as very few people do. She facilitated a process on her home turf that I could not have managed without her help."

The situation did not end happily as Karen hoped. Her sister was involuntarily admitted for treatment at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, where she received top-notch physical care for the last few months of her life. The hospital allowed a departure from Covid19 regulations so she could see her life partner who rode the bus daily to the hospital to be with her.

While Laurel got the medical care she needed, she wasn't happy about being there and was angry at her sister for taking action to put her in the hospital. That dilemma is faced by many family members and caregivers when they make the agonizing decision to submit a loved one to mental health treatment for their own good – even if they resist it.

"It was very, very hard for her," Jody said of Karen. "She wondered if she was doing the right thing for Laurel. It was not rewarded, but it was truly done out of love."

Karen remembers Laurel had happiness in her early life but things changed when she developed mental illness when she was in her 20's, timing that is common with many people. Laurel tried to get help, was hospitalized on

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NAMI WAYNE & HOLMES COUNTIES



Photo taken at the "Expressions of Hope" Art Auction in 2021

The areas NAMI Wayne & Holmes Counties serve have a small but widely diverse population – from suburban residents and factory workers to college students and Amish farmers.

However, the problem of chronic mental illness is the same there as everywhere else in Ohio, affecting about 1 in 5 people across socioeconomic, religious and racial levels.

Helen Walkerly, the dynamic executive director of the NAMI affiliate, has worked tirelessly for years to bring help and support to people in need in the two-county area that has a population of 160,000 – smaller than the city of Akron.

"We have a variety of socioeconomic levels, particularly in Wayne County where we are blessed to have some folks who are financially secure," Helen said. "We have the whole spectrum here." The area has the largest population of Amish residents in the U.S., but it also boasts two higher education centers – the College of Wooster and a branch of Ohio University.

A non-profit mental health advocacy organization was formed in the area in 2000 and eight years later was incorporated into the current NAMI affiliate.

Due to its solid fundraising efforts and support from local mental health agencies, it is one of the few affiliates in Ohio to own its own building, located at 2525 Back Orville Road in Wooster.

Don't let the small population size of the two counties fool you. NAMI Wayne & Holmes Counties is one of the most active affiliates in the state of Ohio.

Much of the affiliate's success is due to Helen's energetic and creative leadership, bridging the gap between diverse communities in the area. The challenge of serving the large Amish community, the so-called "plain folks" who purposely live detached from most aspects of modern life, has been met through many efforts, including a NAMI van that travels into Holmes County almost daily to provide transportation for Amish clients.

The outreach to the Amish is sensitive since there are a variety of Amish sects, Helen said. NAMI has provided family classes in Amish homes for years and has a member of the Amish community on the organization's board of directors.

"The Amish are wonderful, wonderful people," Helen said. "Like in the general population, there is a stigma attached to seeking help for mental health issues. But that has changed in the Amish community because

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NAMI Wayne & Holmes Counties Executive Director Helen Walkerty with NAMI Ohio Director of Affiliates Angela Dugger

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we've been able to show them how helpful it is, and provided them with information about mental illness. It has helped change some of their attitudes."

The affiliate also operates the very busy MOCA House, short for Motivating Optimistic Caring Accepting, a facility open Monday through Friday to anyone in the two counties with mental health concerns. A peer specialist staff member is always on duty and the center offers peer to peer education, expressive art activities health and wellness programs, games and social time, a recovery work group, and Family-to-Family education class.

The affiliate's therapeutic art programs have been so successful that many works of art are sold annually at auction.

Another program serving the overall community is the Local Outreach to Survivors of Suicide Team, or LOSS Team. The affiliate does suicide education and prevention programs, but also participates in the emotional task of going to the scene when someone takes their life to provide support to the family and loved ones.

NAMI is notified by the county coroner so a trained NAMI volunteer can support the family in person or by telephone.

"We often go to the scene and just be with the family. It's an investigation by law enforcement and there's yellow tape and generally the family is kept out of that," Helen said. "We go there to help them."

Even though she's the affiliate director, Helen still actively participates in the LOSS Team. It's known as "post-vention" support since it occurs after a life is lost.

Last but far from least, NAMI Wayne & Holmes Counties is an active participant in Crisis Intervention Training which is aimed at law enforcement to help officers be better able to handle emergency situations when someone with mental illness is involved. In 2019, the affiliate was named as the Ohio Affiliate of the Year in the annual statewide CIT awards.

Jen Grim, who is Director of Advancement for the affiliate, said people in the community know who NAMI is and contribute generously through fundraising efforts, including a walk and 5K race.

NAMI Wayne & Holmes Counties recently had a pleasant chore. Officials had to buy a case to accommodate local, regional and state awards the affiliate has garnered.

The affiliate can be reached online at namiwayneholmes.org or by phone at 330 264-1590.



PEER SPOTLIGHT - LISA MARIE GRIFFIN

Lisa Marie Griffin's life story is a rollercoaster of ups and downs, highs and lows, drugs and sobriety, jail and freedom.

But two points stand out in her memories: flies on a jail window sill and her mother's fur coat. More on those later.

Lisa Marie (like Elvis's daughter, she points out introducing herself) is a firecracker of a mental health advocate, survivor and ex-felon who earlier this year won the Person with Lived Experience Award from the Ohio Crisis Intervention Team statewide program. The nomination called her "dedicated and passionate advocate," with a "phenomenal presence" and "a story as real as it gets."

The award is the NAMI Ohio office in Columbus so people can see it, she said.

"I'm still a work in progress," Lisa Marie said. "I'm a big girl with a big mouth. I used to be a police officer's worst nightmare. When they came on a call about me, they pulled out the shotgun."

But she credits supporters at the NAMI in Cleveland and Akron with saving her life and transforming her from "attitude to gratitude."

Lisa Marie, who recently turned 60, was born and currently lives in Akron. She and her late mother, Ruby Rebecca Lee, fought constantly as she grew up. She never knew her birth father; step-fathers made matters worse.

The end result was Ruby shipped her rebellious teenage daughter off to live with a relative in Houston, TX. Lisa Marie graduated from high school there, but immediately began getting in serious trouble with the law when she returned to Ohio to live in Cleveland.

Her lengthy criminal record includes assault, fleeing police in high-speed chases, robbery, theft, a smash-and-grab at a jewelry store, drug abuse, and so many other charges that looking back Lisa Marie said "I don't know who that person was." She was shot twice, knifed more times than she remembers, and served two sentences in the Ohio Reformatory for Women at Marysville.

She'd been in and out of jail, prison, community corrections facilities and half-way houses so many times it finally dawned on her: she had spent more than half her life locked up or on probation. "I realized I had been in trouble more than I had been free and that that was a form of slavery. I didn't want to spend my life looking over my shoulder."

Lisa Marie was introduced to NAMI and Executive Director Terry Russell in 2003. She trained to be a NAMI peer-to-peer supporter, and eventually did in-service training at the Marysville prison where she had previously been incarcerated.

"NAMI saved my life," she said.

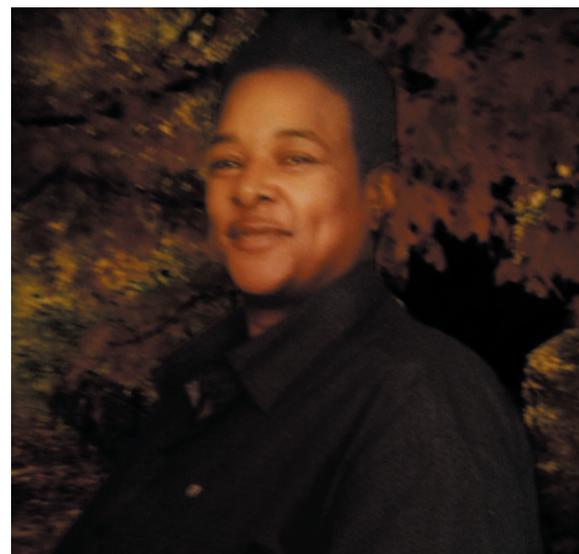
About those two flies. While involved in chemical dependency class while incarcerated, Lisa Marie was asked to write a list of things she would be grateful for in the future. Spotting two flies on her cell window, she said she would be grateful one day to see flies on the window sill of her own home instead of a prison cell.

She also thinks back to the time she and her mother attended the funeral of a relative. Having finally made up with her mother after 41 years of bitter fighting, Lisa Marie broke down during the funeral, buried her face in her mother's fur coat, and cried.

"All along I thought she was the knucklehead and it turned it was me."

Now, Lisa Marie shares all this and more in speaking to law enforcement about how to deal with "knuckleheads," as she says.

"You can take your life back," she says. "People still need us."



Lisa Marie Griffin

PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMS



Monica Jolt-Parish

Mental health peer support programs for adults and teens is like the adage about walking a mile in someone's shoes.

As Atticus Finch, the loving father, said in the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

"You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it."

That's what National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio peer supporters do. They have walked in the shoes of parents, teens and loved ones struggling with mental illness, disabilities and other issues and received special training to share what they've learned to those going through it the first time.

It's called "lived experience."

"It's a supporter who gets where you're coming from," said Tamisha McKenzie, Family Peer Support Coordinator for NAMI Ohio. "It's a person who's been there and done that, like a coach who's going to coach you what to do."

"No one tells you how to be a parent," she added. "There's someone there who can stand alongside of you, even if it's just a phone call."

A Parent's Experience

Monica Jolt-Parish is one of the parents who's been there and done that and recently got training to help other parents in need. Monica is the Family Engagement Director in Stark County Family Court and a parent with lived experience.

"I really wanted to hone my skills to provide whatever families need," she said of the peer support training, which is in addition to her court job. "Family peer support is so needed in the community. I wish we would have had something like this amazing holistic program years ago. It is life changing."

Monica said she will use the NAMI training to "share my life experience to help others. I have a passion for helping people and being of service. Having this relationship with NAMI has intensified that."

Expanding Peer Support

NAMI Ohio is the process of greatly expanded programs to train dozens of new adult peer supporters and, the next level up, to train more trainers. A program for teen peer support is also gearing up. Both programs are being funded with generous financial help from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

NAMI Ohio recently completed the first of several planned "train the trainers" courses which cover 44 hours over five days plus another 16 hours.

McKenzie said the training helps get participants into what she calls the "heart posture" to be able to share their own stories of dealing with mental illness as a prelude to helping others in similar situations.

"We examine their stories. Sometimes they said this is the first time I've had

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Schar Oswald

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reflect on the experience I've gone through with my child. It gets very emotional. They get to pull the bandage off."

NAMI Ohio plans nine more trainings next year, with the goal of getting 16 trainers and 80 to 90 peer supporters to work throughout the state helping parents who are facing difficult situations for the first time. If you are interested in attending or learning more about an upcoming training please contact Tamisha McKenzie at tamisha@namiohio.org.

A Parent Helping Others

Like most parents facing their child's mental health issues for the first time, Schar Oswald said she felt scared, alone and helpless. Her son, Jordan, had a host of issues, including anxiety and depression, addiction and traumatic brain injury.

After years of struggle and frustration, Schar hooked up with NAMI Ohio and received peer support earlier this year. Recently she took the next step by going through 60 hours of training to become a trainer to help others. "I only saw my son's disease. The training opened me to all of it to see all the differences out there," she said. "I went to counseling and meetings and never felt like anything I was receiving was valuable," Schar said of her past experience seeking help for Jordan. "There was nobody to help us."

The NAMI training opened her eyes and enabled Schar to help others in similar situations. "I can't fix it for them, but I can help."

"The main thing I learned is there is hope," Schar said.

Peer Support for Teens

A new peer support program for youth and young adults in transition, ages 14 through 21 years, with serious emotional disturbance, mental illness, and possibly substance abuse and developmental disabilities is being developed by NAMI Ohio. It will operate similarly to the parent peer support program.

New grant funds are being used to develop a Youth Peer Support curriculum, with the help of young people with lived experience. Training for that program, to train other teens as peer supporters, is expected to begin in the near future.

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several occasions and spent some time in group homes, but eventually she walled herself off from her family, refusing all contact for 10 years. Somehow during that time, Laurel lost her eyesight; her health problems mounted, including kidney disease and emphysema.

"She was in that situation, going downhill for years," Karen said. "There was too much for me to fix." She even offered to buy a house for Laurel and her male partner, who also struggled with his own mental health problems; they refused.

The decision to go to probate court, legally forcing her sister to get treatment she needed but against her will, still haunts Karen. "You have to make your own peace with it. I still don't know if I did the right thing."

"There was peace and care in her last few days. I'm glad she's not suffering anymore."

Karen and Jody came to agree: sometimes you must be grateful for the small things, even if the big ones evade your grasp.

"The best you can do with a mentally ill family member," Karen said, "is look for small bits of life, the small graces."



Advocate Spotlight

VALERIE WALKER



From the time she was a child, Valerie Walker liked taking care of those in need, especially children. She learned it from her mother, Vellier, who was active in church outreach, and her father, Herbert, who volunteered with the Boys and Girls Clubs in Cincinnati.

"I think it's just who I am," Valerie said. "My thing is taking care of people."

Valerie wears many hats: parent, accountant, minister, church volunteer, homeless advocate and board member for the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio.

Despite many accomplishments, Valerie is modest and soft-spoken. "It's not about me. It's about 'we,'" she said.

The Cincinnati native's passion, as she puts it, is to "encourage, advocate, support and educate those living with a mental illness and their loved ones, especially those experiencing homelessness in our communities."

She was raised in a Christian family and is the oldest of seven children. Valerie's parents "taught me to give back from an early age," she said.

Her efforts to help the homeless, especially children, are focused through the Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cincinnati. The 30-year old organization that began when a handful of Cincinnati-area churches and synagogues opened their doors to homeless families. The network now has more than 100 congregational partners representing all faiths, funding from the United Way and City of Cincinnati, and provides overnight shelter, food, daycare and other services to homeless families.

Homeless children touch Valerie's heart the most, especially since the COVID-19 virus plagued the community beginning last year.

"The children have lost their home, and they don't know why," she said. "They've lost their friends. They have to learn to wear a mask. Their parents are home or out of work and more children are suffering."

"My concern is their mental health," said Valerie, who has been on the NAMI Ohio Board and co-chair of NAMI Urban Greater Cincinnati since 2017. "They lost connection with their schools and their friends. Many parents are frustrated and angry. There are so many untold stories."

Valerie and her colleagues have parties and pizza nights for kids to relieve a bit of the sadness kids suffer from losing their homes and stability.

Valerie, the parent of two children herself, said NAMI and other groups are pushing to help kids by ensuring there is a mental health provider available at every school. That help is needed regularly, she said, not just when a child acts out and gets sent to juvenile detention. By then, problems have started that could potentially have been averted by early intervention.

There is hope for the future, Valerie believes, because she has watched Gov. Mike DeWine provide increased funding and support for mental health programs in general and for children in particular."

"I know he's a person that cares," she said.

Information about the Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cincinnati is available online at <https://ihncincinnati.org/>

COMING IN 2022:

988 NATIONAL SUICIDE HOTLINE

A new emergency number to summon help for people in a mental health or suicidal crisis, **988**, is coming nationwide next July.

Officials hope 988 will eventually become as well-known as 911, the emergency call number used in the U.S. since 1968. At the same time, the goal is to take pressure off the 911 system, which typically summons police or paramedics, and to better focus 988 help on crisis services for those who require specialized mental health intervention.

"It's a game-changer," said Tony Coder, executive director of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation, "for the simple reason it's easy to remember - not like an 800 number."

"We need to change crisis in Ohio from a law enforcement response to a mental health response," Tony said. "It's going to happen and we need to be as prepared as possible. We can't let people continue to fall through the cracks."

The federal government passed regulations putting 988 into operation as a behavioral health crisis line on July 16, 2022, explained Stacy Frohnappel-Hasson, who is handling implementing the new network in the Buckeye State for the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. The system has startup funds of \$400 million from the federal government.

State lawmakers are currently working on legislation to adopt the 988 network in Ohio.

Stacey said the new service is critically needed to "treat the whole person," not just in physical emergencies but in emotional crisis, too.

Callers to 988 will be answered at one of 15 designated lifeline call answering points in Ohio, she said. They will be able to talk to a trained specialist who will have access to a statewide database of resources for mental health crisis, suicide prevention and related behavioral care issues. Stacey estimated that the vast majority of

callers will be receive counseling help on the call, but perhaps 20 percent will require an in-person emergency response involved a trained mental health professional.

Stacey said the 988 network will of necessity develop over time and won't be at full capacity next July. "We want convince people 988 is a safe place to call. We want people to feel comfortable and not wait until they're positive there's crisis going on."

Currently, more than 40 percent of Ohio calls to the national suicide line are answered out of state, where operators are often unfamiliar with local services that available. That should change when the statewide response network is in place with a electronic service database available to all operators.

Terry Russell, executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio, said the organization, the state's largest independent voice for individuals with persistent mental illness and their families, remains concerned about the inadequacy of services for callers seeking behavioral health help.

"NAMI Ohio has made it clear we support the concept of 988 but we also believe the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services must move quickly on implementing a statewide crisis response system that provides the next line of support. We should be talking about what those living with mental illness and their families will be calling about and how we can be prepared to provide them with the services they need."

"People who can function in the community and participate in their care do extremely well," he continued. "But the current system does not offer the community support program that so many people need, such as housing, rehabilitation, socialization and employment. That is what we are urging that the discussion be about."

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"People are in crisis today and need help," Terry said. "We continue to send them to homeless shelters, under bridges, in prisons and jails. This must stop. It will happen if we work together and prioritize what is most important."

In Cincinnati, Alex Rulon is Director of Community Care for Talbert House, which is part of an existing emergency response system for mental health crisis. Talbert House, a community based social services agency in operation since the 1950s, fields about 25,000 to 30,000 crisis calls per year, plus reaches another 70,000 people through prevention services. The agency has 20 full time crisis call operators and serves as one of nine call backup centers for the national suicide hotline.

"A lot of these calls are scary as it can be life or death." Alex said. "Either they don't have anybody to do turn to or they don't feel comfortable reaching out. We are the last stop on the bus."

The value of 988, he said, is, "No matter where

you are, you are three numbers away from having immediate access to someone to help with mental health crisis."

Like Terry Russell and others, Alex is concerned about having the necessary services to provide help for callers when next July rolls around.

"It's not going to happen overnight," he said. "We're going to be moving forward as a united team."

NAMI Ohio Deputy Director Luke Russell, a member of the state 988 planning committee, said the state must develop a "continuum of crisis care" for the system to operate as envisioned. "We want to make sure people are being directed in the right direction to access care. The 988 number is another piece of the puzzle, like Crisis Intervention training, and moving people into treatment instead of incarceration."





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