

Stepping Up for NAMI

by Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, April 2014

Mental illness, such as major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, panic disorder, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), borderline personality disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder, affects the lives of tens of millions of people in the United States. Families, friends, classmates and co-workers often find themselves wanting to help but not knowing what to do. Thankfully there is the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), an organization that advocates for people with mental illness that was founded in 1979 by family members of people suffering from mental illness. The helping hand that NAMI extends often comes from family members who have had similar experiences as those seeking help. As such NAMI offers a special kind of support and understanding that is both effective and compassionate, and NAMI's meetings, support groups, classes and educational presentations are provided for free.

To help NAMI continue to offer their needed services for free, individuals on 70 different teams will be donning team tee-shirts and gathering together on the morning of May 3rd for the 10th Anniversary NAMI Walk, NAMI's only fundraiser of the year. The 5K walk will begin at 10:30 AM at the Ventura Beach Promenade, with check-in starting at 9AM. Everyone is welcome, and if you can't walk with us you can still donate, and all are invited to do so!

NAMI has been a strong partner with the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department. They have initiated helpful programs including "Friends in the Lobby" where NAMI members offer assistance to families and friends who come to visit their loved ones at our county's Inpatient Psychiatric Units (Ventura County Medical Center, and Aurora Vista del Mar).

At a time when a shocking one-fourth of California prisoners have been diagnosed with mental illness, Ventura County has seen a significant drop in mentally ill prisoners in our County jails due to the collaborative efforts of health and public safety partners, and advocates on our Behavioral Health Advisory Board, The Client Network, and NAMI.

It takes a concerted effort to face society's most daunting challenges. I'm grateful for the support of the Board of Supervisors, County staff, and the clients in our mental health system and their family members who have dedicated themselves to the single purpose of providing the best care for those with mental illness. In the last few years we've been able to open a crisis residential treatment center, increase the number of crisis intervention emergency responders, train law enforcement on de-escalating confrontations with mentally ill people, increase the amount of supportive housing, and begin plans to build a mental health rehabilitation center, which will allow county residents who require intensive treatment in a secure setting to remain in the county, close to loved ones.

The County, in collaboration with its many community partners and stakeholders, is always looking for ways to improve the care of people with these chronic illnesses. We are now focusing efforts on ensuring that people with mental illness who are released from emergency rooms, jails, and crisis facilities receive a "warm hand off" to needed aftercare and treatment. We know that people with serious and persistent mental illness can get better and that recovery can happen, and that motivates us to do more. We can all make a difference by supporting the good works of NAMI. Your involvement

can help people who are suffering find light in their darkness, and help make their lives more stable and satisfying. What could be better than that? To step up for the NAMI Walk or donate, please go to: NAMIwalks.org/VenturaCounty

Supervisor Linda Parks is the Honorary Chair of the 10th Anniversary NAMI Walk and will be walking with her Team, "The Mighty Oaks." She can be reached at Linda.Parks@ventura.org, (805) 214-2510