

Walk for 'Freedom from Stigma' of mental illness

Published in the Asbury Park Press 10/05/04

More than 4,000 people are expected to participate in Sunday's "Freedom from Stigma" walk being held by NAMI New Jersey, the Alliance for Persons Affected by Mental Illness, at Liberty State Park, Jersey City.

NAMI, which considers itself the "state's voice on mental illness," estimates 1.7 million New Jerseyans manage mental illness daily.

The two-mile walk takes place at Liberty State Park on Sunday, Oct. 10. Registration begins at 11 a.m. and opening ceremonies begin at 1 p.m., with the walk starting at 1:30 p.m. There is no fee to participate or minimum donation.

The walk will take place rain or shine. In case of rain, donations may be mailed to NAMI NJ, 1562 Route 130, North Brunswick, NJ, 08902.

A bus to transport walkers in this area to the park will leave from the Lincroft area of Middletown at 11 a.m. Contact one of the local organizers at (732) 787-6687 for more information on the bus.

According to organizers, the hope is that participants will enjoy the day and show their interest in finding better treatments and cures for mental illnesses.

In addition to the park's scenic views, entertainers such as musicians, DJs and clowns will be on hand. Politicians, including U.S. Senator Jon Corzine, and several other federal and state politicians will attend. Ample parking is available.

Sylvia Axelrod, NAMI New Jersey executive director said, "This is an opportunity for the entire mental health community of New Jersey to walk together -- to reach out to families, friends, colleagues, fellow workers, agencies, businesses and the community. Our goal is that this walk will have a great impact in creating awareness and de-stigmatizing mental illness."

This is the second statewide walk sponsored by NAMI New Jersey. It will cap NAMI NJ's year-long "Freedom from Stigma" campaign to raise awareness about mental illnesses and to reduce the stigma so often associated with these disorders.

Proceeds will benefit people who experience mental illness, their families and others who are somehow affected by these disorders, by enabling NAMI NJ to continue to provide a wide array of free-of-charge programs of support, education and advocacy. Kathleen Considine, 2004 NAMI NJ walk coordinator, said "The walk is a celebration of hope in an era when new medications and treatment have made recovery achievable. It is fitting that the walk occur in sight of the Statue of Liberty, a universal symbol of hope and optimism."

NAMI New Jersey's inaugural walk in 2003, part of a national NAMI program, NAMIWALKS for the Mind of America, attracted more than 2,000 walkers and raised more than \$200,000 in donations. Of 12 participating sites nationwide, NAMI New Jersey was No. 1 in both participation and funds raised. For more information on the walk, call NAMI New Jersey at (732) 940-0991 or (800) 706-0316 or e-mail info@naminj.org.