March’s Presentation: “H-O-P-E by John Gesumaria”

H – Honesty   O – Optimism   P – Persistence   E - Endurance

John Gesumaria is a longtime member of NAMI who serves on our affiliate Board of Directors. Come hear him speak of his journey of hope in living with Bipolar 2 and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder whose symptoms began in childhood. He will share the onset of his mental health diagnosis, challenges, acceptance, treatment, therapy, medication, recovery, positive coping skills, and managing a mentally healthy life. John is personable and articulate. You are bound to find his story uplifting and very candid.

John is a first-year Master of Social Work student at Columbia University focusing on mental health and disabilities program development. Before school, he worked in the financial services industry for 9 years. He currently is an intern with NAMI NJ assisting with administering a new NJ Dept. of Health grant for the four NJ State psychiatric hospitals.

John has presented at NAMI monthly public meetings and spoken at Columbia University, Kean University, Union County College and at Crisis Intervention training, all to share his mental health lived experiences and recovery. John is also the co-lead for the NY Region at the Stability Network, where he advocates for mental health in the workplace.

Register in advance for this meeting: https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMuduqogj0iGtQ-FqW_oMJV53INjhH9iYk

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

→ An email reminder with a clickable link to register will be emailed to those of you who’ve provided us with your email address.

Our meetings are an opportunity for information sharing with others who have a common interest. Our format is relaxed and audience participation is welcomed. If you’d like to learn more about mental illness, please join our discussion. There is no charge. Our information and friendship are priceless – and free.

Online presentation of “H-O-P-E by John Gesumaria”
Tuesday, March 23rd, 7:30 pm
President’s Message

Hello all,

I don’t know about you but I have a greater sense of Hope as we move into March 2021. Our February Circle of Friends zoom gathering was a perfect HOPE 2021 kickoff for NAMI Union County. The evening brought many friends together – new and well-known – displaying just what NAMI UC strives to be – a source of Support, Education and above all, Community for caretakers and families caring for a loved one with a mental illness.

NAMI Union County continues to adapt so we can bring our programs to you in the safest way at this time. Our dedicated volunteers have spent many hours getting trained so we can now offer the monthly Family Support Group meetings (every 3rd Tuesday) and the newly updated 8-week Family to Family course via Zoom. In addition, our monthly Speaker presentation meetings will continue to be accessible to all via Zoom.

Speaking of outstanding NAMI UC volunteers, I’d like to congratulate Joann Mehalick, one of our founding members, who was named CIT-NJ Peer of the Year. Her colleague at CIT trainings, Capt. Abdul Williams of the Linden Police Dept., was also honored at CIT Coordinator of the Year. See page 3 for details.

Another dedicated NAMI volunteer, John Gesumaria, will be the speaker at our March 23rd Public meeting. This will be a very special evening. Trust me, you don’t want to miss it.

These past 12 months, as never before, more and more people are recognizing that Mental Health plays a key role in our overall health. NAMI’s mission has been to make mental health a subject that can be more openly discussed. NAMI UC is always looking for new volunteers to help us serve our community with education, support and advocacy. If you have an interest, reach out to us and we can share ideas.

Don’t forget to mark Tuesday, March 23rd on your calendar to meet John G. Join us! I think you will be glad you did. Keep the Hope alive.

Julie Donohue
President, NAMI of Union County

Calendar

**Family Support:** 3rd Tuesday of every month 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM
- March 16
- April 20
- May 18

To register, e-mail Denise at namiunioncounty@yahoo.com with your name, town, and phone number.

**Speaker Presentation:** 4th Tuesday 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM
- March 23
- April 27
- May 25

To register, go to http://www.naminj.org/support/affiliates/union/ >Upcoming Event>Click on the Register here link. Link will not be available until a few days before the event.

All meetings conducted via ZOOM till further notice.

NAMI of Union County Officers of the Board of Directors
President Julie Donohue  Vice President Denise Gesumaria  Secretary Irene Bieniaszewski
Treasurer Pam Eagan  * Newsletter Editor Chris Russo
CIT New Jersey Peer of the Year Award
Ms. Joann Mehalick

Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) New Jersey selected our own Joann Mehalick as the New Jersey CIT Peer of the Year for 2020. The statewide Award acknowledges Joann’s active involvement with CIT-NJ as a community program and her contributions which have greatly enhanced the program’s success. Joann is dedicated to her work for CIT in Union County. She has served on the Union County CIT Steering Committee for more than 10 years.

The diagnosis of mental illness in her eldest son prompted Joann’s interest in mental health advocacy. As one of the earliest presidents of the Union County affiliate of NAMI (2000-2004), she found that a surprisingly large number of NAMI members felt the interactions that their loved ones had with the police could have been handled with much better outcomes for all. Then, the tragic death in 2006 of a close friend of her son’s in such an interaction compelled Joann to act further.

Joann initiated the idea of a de-escalation training video for law enforcement, specific to New Jersey. The “The Community I Serve” DVD was produced and shown to all Union County officers in adjunct with in-person training on de-escalation techniques and facts about mental illness. Joann’s advocacy helped bring the official CIT program to Union County in 2010 and continue its work to date, even in the face of Covid and budget cuts, working tirelessly behind the scenes and lobbying for CIT in the public sector. Joann continues to serve on the NAMI Union County Board of Directors, currently as Community-Police Liaison.

CIT New Jersey Coordinator of the Year Award
Capt. Abdul Williams

Capt. Abdul Williams of the Linden Police Dept. was honored as the New Jersey CIT Coordinator of the Year Award for 2020. This award acknowledges his exemplary leadership in organizing Union County’s CIT-NJ program, ensuring community support and participation, and managing the growth and sustainability of CIT-NJ as a successful community program.

Capt. Williams is a NAMI member and has long been an organizer and presenter at CIT classes in Union County. The Linden Police Department has been a pioneer agency in bringing CIT training to other departments across the county and state, thanks to the cooperation and support of the Union County Prosecutor's Office and both former and present county prosecutors and staffs. CIT training provided to officers has resulted in persons obtaining mental health treatment at a local hospital and no injury to any of the responding police officers.

Capt. Williams is gracious too. On Facebook, he commented on Joann Mehalick’s award: “Well deserved Joann, one of the people I credit with opening my eyes to the struggles of those with a mental illness.”

We are so proud that both Joann and Capt. Williams are recognized with these prestigious Awards. Congratulations!!

CIT training is active in 19 of New Jersey’s 21 counties. To learn more about CIT, visit: cit-nj.org
Social Security Disability Benefits – Getting Started

One of the topics brought up at last month’s “Circle of Friends” meeting was how to apply for Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Disabling mental illness deals a tremendous blow to one’s economic livelihood. We encourage you to check into eligibility and begin the application process once it’s apparent that long-term financial assistance is necessary.

- Visit www.ssa.gov/benefits/disability/ [recommended first step] or call (800) 772-1213
  Local office: Union County office of Social Security (877) 803-6306  855 Lehigh Avenue, Union

SSDI – Social Security Disability Income
Who is eligible: People who’ve worked long enough and recently enough and earned enough “credits,” that is, paid taxes into Social Security. The number of “credits” you need depends upon the age at which you became disabled. The SSA decides if you cannot do the work you did before and cannot adjust to other work because of your medical condition. Disability must last, or be expected to last, for at least a year or result in death. Your case will be reviewed periodically throughout your lifetime.

SSI – Supplemental Security Income
Who is eligible: People, including children, with little work history and few financial resources. Social Security administers the program, although money comes from general revenue, not from a payroll tax as does SSDI.

- SSA often denies the first application. If they do, begin the appeals process, using the skills of a lawyer in the field.
  Community Health Law Project provides free or low-cost legal assistance for appeals. CHLP has shown exceptional success in winning appeals; they receive NJ State funds (that is, your tax dollars) for this. www.chlp.org
  Local office: 65 Jefferson Ave., 4th Floor, Elizabeth (908) 355-8282

In all, be prepared to spend a lot of time and submit a lot of information about the applicant. It’ll take months to receive benefits after applying. You must be persistent and exceptionally thorough to obtain these necessary and legal benefits. Good luck!

Trinitas Receives $3.7 Million Grant for Behavioral Health

Trinitas Regional Medical Center received a $3,719,000 federal grant from the Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Mental Health Services to support their behavioral health and psychiatry program, which has grown into one of the largest hospital-based mental health centers in New Jersey over the past 50 years.

Trinitas will use the funds to expand and increase operations of mental health care, including a program designed to identify adult Union County residents who have had an acute psychiatric crisis and are in need of community services for psychiatric, medical, and substance use services. The goal is to alleviate decades-old challenges in providing access to mental health and addiction care, as well as the range of social determining factors that complicate community stability, housing, social services, legal, Medicaid, transportation, etc. The program is set to launch this month to provide outreach to community sites as needed.

“The program ensures that these individuals in need receive fully integrated care on an ongoing basis to help stabilize them in the community and reduce hospitalizations,” said James McCreath, Ph.D., Vice President Behavioral Health & Psychiatry at Trinitas.

Adapted from Tapinto.net Elizabeth, 2/26/2021:
https://www.tapinto.net/towns/elizabeth/sections/health-and-wellness/articles/trinitas-receives-3-7-million-grant-for-behavioral-health