You are not alone.
At NAMI Seattle, we help people impacted by mental health conditions feel less alone, and know they matter. Our peer-led services bridge the gap when medical models fail to meet our needs. We have over 40 years of experience elevating stories of lived experience and shining a spotlight on the unique needs and strengths of people navigating their mental health journey. Find the NAMI program that’s right for you.

**NAMI In Our Own Voice**

In Our Own Voice presentations change attitudes, assumptions and stereotypes about people with mental health conditions. These 45-60 minute presentations provide a personal perspective of mental illness, as presenters with lived experience talk openly about what it’s like to live with a mental health condition.

**Ending the Silence**

Ending the Silence is a 50-60 minute in-school presentation designed to teach middle and high school students, parents, caregivers, and teachers about the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions, how to recognize the early warning signs and the importance of acknowledging those warning signs.

**NAMI On Campus**

NAMI on Campus is an extension of NAMI’s mission into the campus community. NAMI on Campus clubs are student-led clubs that tackle mental health issues on campus by raising mental health awareness, educating the campus community, supporting students, promoting services, supports and advocacy.

**NAMI Family Support Group**

NAMI Family Support Group is a peer-led support group for family members, caregivers and loved ones of individuals living with mental health conditions. Gain insight from the challenges and successes of others facing similar circumstances. You’re not alone!

**NAMI Peer-to-Peer**

NAMI Peer-to-Peer is a free, 8-session educational program for adults with mental health conditions who are looking to better understand their condition, and journey toward recovery in a confidential space.

**NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group**

NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group is a free, peer-led support group for adults living with mental illness. You will gain insight from hearing the challenges and successes of others, and the groups are led by NAMI-trained facilitators who’ve been there.

For more information or to request a program, visit namiseattle.org/programs or call (206) 783-9264.
Hello,

This is the end of March. The crocuses are sprouting. The Lenten roses are blooming. Spring is finally here.

At NAMI Seattle we have been super busy.

In January, NAMI Seattle led two workshops of NAMI Smarts for Advocacy. These workshops teach participants how to enhance their advocacy skills and shape a powerful and personal story that will move policy makers.

Volunteers from our Family-to-Family program met at the Northeast Library to share notes and to offer suggestions to Katie Mahoney, our Program Manager. It was an opportunity to build relationships and share stories of our work.

In February, we launched the first ever Family-to-Family program provided in Spanish in Washington State.

NAMI Seattle hosted Cup of Comfort: A People of Color Appreciation Event. Volunteers of color involved with NAMI throughout King County came together for a night of community building and socializing.

Additionally on February 18, NAMI Lobby Day, 185 NAMI Staff, family members and volunteers traveled to Olympia to meet with legislators and make the case for NAMI Washington's 2019 legislative priorities.

We held our staff and board retreat on March 9th. Fourteen of us came together to commit to the work of NAMI Seattle which is to build a movement, to connect people and resources, and to strengthen the organization.

Since January a total of 35 people attended our Volunteer Orientation classes to learn about the process of becoming NAMI Seattle volunteers.

We are building a movement.

Let’s do this!
Get ready to GiveBIG for mental health! NAMI Seattle invites you to join us for GiveBIG 2019, courtesy of 501 Commons. With help from supporters like yourself, our programs and advocacy have continued to grow. May is Mental Health Month, which is the perfect time to show your support. We believe that everyone living with a mental illness is entitled to support and compassion from the community during their journey towards recovery. Please join us in building a movement to end mental health stigma in our community and to help people find much needed services.

We can make a difference together.

Our goal this year is to raise $18k, with a generous collection of donors matching up to $5k.

Early giving begins April 23rd.

Learn more about GiveBIG 2019 at bit.ly/namiseattleGiveBIG
The Future Is Bright
NAMI Rings in 2019 with a Gala

On New Year’s Eve, we celebrated 40 years of filling the gaps in the Seattle mental health system with a 1920s-themed gala at beautiful Sodo Park in Georgetown. Thanks to everyone who joined us that night to ring in the new year with us!
As part of the celebration we honored five awardees whose work exemplifies our organizational values:

**Lifetime Achievement Award: Eleanor Owen**
Eleanor served as NAMI Seattle’s Founder, President and Executive Director from 1978-2002 and helped launch NAMI as a national organization. She is a tireless champion for changing the mental health system and helped advocate for many sweeping changes in mental health across the state.

**Community Champion Award: Beth Anne Katz**
Beth Anne’s mission is to end mental illness stigma by using herself as a public example of what embracing mental health and fighting the stigma looks like. She hopes that through videos of her own adventures, she can encourage others to get help earlier and change perceptions about mental illness.

**Light Up Recovery Award: Zia Larson’s Ray of Light Foundation**
Zia Larson’s Ray of Light Foundation was inspired by the love of a mother in reverence of the life of her son. The Foundation works to inspire hope for those in need of help as they cope with mental illnesses and to encourage society to unite and confront our need for mental health solutions.

**Community Connector Award: Peer Seattle (pka Seattle Area Support Groups)**
Peer Seattle provides emotional support and development services to the LGBTQ+ community and their allies embracing issues of mental health, chemical and behavioral addiction, and chronic illness. Their work is done in a spirit of safety, trust, inclusiveness, and celebration of individual differences.

**Transformational Leadership Award: Hero House Northwest**
Through meaningful relationships, Clubhouse members have real opportunities to reintegrate into society by becoming gainfully employed, pursuing education, and attaining stable housing. With a 13-year history of serving King County, and they are on a mission to create communities of hope and opportunity across the state.

All photos by Alabastro Photography.
Colin's curiosity about mental health and his interest in medicine brought him to NAMI Seattle. This was his last quarter at the University of Washington, where he earned his degree in Psychology.

One of Colin's favorite components of his NAMI internship was becoming familiar with the wide variety of mental health resources and programs in Seattle, and referring those community members who called our Helpline to them.

This quarter, our interns were on a mission to discover and analyze the needs of our community. When someone calls our Helpline, what kind of help are they seeking? What can we do for them? Because of Colin’s and Megan’s diligent efforts, we have a greater understanding of the ways in which NAMI Seattle serves our community members through referral and outreach.

Whether a person is in need of resources or interested in volunteering, our hope is that everyone who comes to NAMI Seattle can move through the world feeling empowered and connected. We so appreciate the time that Colin and Megan have spent with us and we wish them the best in their future endeavors.

To learn more about volunteering or interning with NAMI Seattle, go to namiseattle.org/get-involved
NAMI Seattle held its first NAMI Smarts for Advocacy class of 2019 in January! Training was held at a newly opened coffee shop nestled in the South Park neighborhood of Seattle. One of our first trainings held in South/West Seattle, the class was a hit. With an overwhelming community response, we packed Resistencia Coffee with passionate advocates with the desire to make a difference in mental health care.

In case you’re unfamiliar, NAMI Smarts for Advocacy is a hands-on advocacy training program that helps people living with mental illness, friends and family transform their lived experience into skillful compelling stories that inspire and get an “ask” down to 90 seconds. Training can also cover writing an effective email, making an elevator speech or an impactful phone call and, of course, orchestrating a successful meeting with an elected official.

In anticipation of NAMI Lobby Day, this class was designed specifically to simulate a successful meeting with and elected official. During Lobby Day, mental health supporters from all over Washington gather in Olympia to meet one-on-one with policymakers! Most of our recent Smarts attendees expressed a desire to participate in this year’s Lobby Day which took place on February 18th, 2019.

The unique step-by-step, skill-building design of NAMI Smarts for Advocacy is effective with a wide range of participants, including those who are new to advocacy as well as individuals with years of experience. Participants routinely share that they’ve never been able to condense their story or made a clear “ask,” but with NAMI Smarts, they have the skills they need to succeed.

If you are interested in participating in an upcoming NAMI Smarts for Advocacy training, call NAMI Seattle at (206) 783-9264, or email Katie.
Volunteer Highlight
Michelle Yang

Could you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got involved with NAMI?

My family immigrated to the US from South Korea when I was 9. That first year was quite difficult. None of us spoke English. We moved all over the country before settling in the Southwest. Always a high achiever, I grew up with tremendous pressures to succeed and fit a very specific mold. By age 20, I had been hospitalized and diagnosed with bipolar disorder, but my family still lived in denial. It wasn't until I moved to Seattle for graduate school at University of Washington in 2007 that I gained enough perspective to begin my journey of finding peace with my mental health condition. It was slow, baby steps and quite scary to attend my first support group at NAMI, but I am so happy I did. I never before had regular access to a community like this. I knew immediately that group was something that needed to be a regular part of my life. I only regretted not finding the support group earlier.

Why did you decide to become a support group facilitator?

A couple of months after I started attending group, the facilitator announced she was stepping down to begin a new graduate program. This group would temporarily disband unless someone could take over immediately. She asked the room for volunteers. I looked around and could feel the panic and discomfort among us. People definitely relied on this group for support as part of their self-care routine and it would be bad news for it to stop, even temporarily. That's how I decided to take over as a facilitator even though I was one of the newcomers. I was glad that Rachel, another longtime NAMI volunteer and support group attendee, later offered to support the group as well. Now it's been years and facilitating group has contributed so much to my confidence and taught me so much. The NAMI Connections support group leader training I attended also contributed to my feeling empowered and emboldened enough to become a stronger advocate for mental health awareness. In fact, just a couple months ago, I became public with my bipolar 1 diagnosis. This part of myself was something I hid from nearly everyone. I was compelled to do my part by sharing my own story in order to break the stigma and stop discrimination against people who live with mental health conditions.

What has been your favorite part of facilitating the support group?

The people! Every group member has taught me so much. I often walk away after meetings astounded by the wisdom and insight offered by attendees. I have learned so much about my own biases against mental health conditions, including bipolar disorder. Identifying my own stigma and shame has been the first step toward finding peace and loving myself. I feel thankful to hear everyone's stories which have bestowed me with a greater level of compassion and understanding. Without group, I wouldn't know how differently mental health conditions can manifest, even with the same diagnosis. And how difficult it can be to find the right medication and treatment, no matter how hard the individual is trying. It's a regular reminder of how truly fortunate I am to have found a medication that has been effective for me for decades. My other favorite part of facilitating group is ending each meeting with a gratitude circle. There's something special about the simple act of going around and sharing three things we're grateful for that week. It feels wonderful to ground us in positivity and hope as we depart to face the world until next time.
What is next for you?
During times of my deepest struggle and isolation, the public library next to my family's restaurant was my safe place. There I could find help and escape in the rows and rows of books. When I was first diagnosed with bipolar disorder after the worst episode of my life, I was terrified. I didn't know if all of my accomplishments to date would matter. I feared I'd have to drop out of college and gone would be any hope of graduate school, a career, a family. I looked to the books for guidance, for an example of anyone living well with bipolar disorder. At that time, I struggled to find anyone, especially someone I could relate to on a cultural level as an immigrant, dealing with similar family pressures. That's why I'm writing a book to share my story, to encourage others that a mental health diagnosis is not a death sentence. A great life is more than possible. While my book is in progress, I am advocating for mental health wellness through my blog livingwellhappily.com and on social media.

From Michelle's Blog: Just Say Hi

I drove by a homeless man today sitting in front of a drug store entrance with a cardboard sign. When two people walked out, he smiled brightly and greeted them. They in return averted their eyes, pretended not to see him, and shuffled quickly away.

What would it be like to have your presence invalidated all the time? For people to not see you?

I live in a city where many complain of a “homeless problem.”

“Some people just don’t want to be helped,” they say.

I have heard kindhearted people dehumanize the homeless. Making jokes, even taking photos of them while they’re sleeping, without consent, and posting the photos on social media for laughs. (Laughs, to my horror, which they get!)

I was at a summer street festival with a group of friends when they spotted some punky street youth. Two peo-
people in our group sneaked up behind them and started exaggeratedly sniffing around. I couldn’t believe my eyes. Wanting no part of this, my husband and I separated from the group.

When I think of the homeless, I think how easily I could have been one of them. If I didn’t have the means to pay for my medication. If my parents hadn’t been there to take care of me when I was diagnosed. If I had gotten lost in the streets during an episode, I could easily have been wandering the world alone, not knowing where I am.

Out of over half a million homeless people surveyed, “…25% of the American homeless... were seriously mentally ill at any given point in time. 45% of the homeless had a form of mental illness.” –Mental Illness Policy Org.

I could easily be one of them.

I think of all the people who were dealt a less fortunate hand in life. For example, the kids in foster care who get bounced from home to home and never adopted.

“Approximately 400,000 youth are currently in foster care in the United States. Approximately 20,000 of those youth age-out each year without positive familial supports or any family connection at all. Within 18 months of emancipation 40-50% of foster youth become homeless.” –Foster Focus

I think of Summer from my high school, a sweet bespectacled girl with a brown hair and an easy smile. I didn’t know she was in the state’s care until she’d run away from her foster home, never to return.

Trying to protect me, my parents always taught me not to make eye contact with people who live in the streets. Avoiding them was to avoid potential unpleasant confrontation. I grew up practicing this until college when I decided it sounded fun to volunteer at a soup kitchen. I expected to make dozens of sandwiches and dole out bowls of steaming soup, which I did. What I did not expect was to sit among the homeless people partaking the meals. Over time, mutually therapeutic bonds formed over casual conversations and laughs over cheesy dad jokes. They were just normal people. They were not there to hurt me or rob me. I didn’t need to fear them or put up extra armor to be in their proximity just because they were homeless.

I’m very lucky that my college scholarship program furthered my education by hosting a speaker series on homelessness curated by a caring former mayor. There were panels made up of homeless people and I obnoxiously peppered them with endless, inappropriate questions, like, “How did you end up with SEVEN kids while homeless?”

Looking back with more maturity and perspective, I am mortified by my naive questions. But I’m glad I asked them. They helped me peel back the layers of misunderstanding, fear, and mystery. My bold and insensitive questions allowed me to really learn the story behind a strong, devoted mother who would do anything for her children, who herself, starving, started drinking hard alcohol at age 5 because that was the only source of sustenance in her neglected home.

The speaker series provided a safe space that allowed me to ask my judgmental questions, to really listen to the people kind and patient enough to educate me and delivered me to a place of compassion. To a place where when I meet a person who lives in the streets, I can smile, look them in the eyes, and just say hi.

Michelle’s work can be found on her blog livingwellhappily.com, on Facebook/Instagram @michelleyangwriter and Twitter @MichelleHYang.
This Is Not A Test
Mental Health in the Muslim Community

I’m someone who is very involved in the Muslim community because of my volunteering history. I’ve volunteered a lot in planning social events and in helping create awareness and safe spaces for Muslims. As a Muslim myself, I’ve learned some things about how my Muslim community views mental health challenges.

The Muslim community shares some challenges in mental health awareness that are similar to other religious groups, such as Christians. People are told the usual “get closer to God” or “pray more”; you should “calm down” and “trust God” if you have anxiety. Someone who is suicidal is considered ungrateful. Suffering, including mental health challenges, is “a test from God,” and because of that belief, some people accept suffering instead of asking for help.

Things are starting to change, but there are still problems.

Fortunately, the Muslim community in Puget Sound in particular has started to address the fact that anxiety and depression are common mental health challenges among immigrants. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is recognized as especially common among refugees. However, severe mental health conditions like Schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder, still need room for discussion.

What’s our barrier to getting help? Is it really just the stigma?

Muslims as well as immigrants from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, are not portrayed positively in the media and in American society. We are feared, a people dehumanized and scapegoated for many of the world’s problems. This decreases our ability to be vulnerable because we are too busy defending ourselves. Not all immigrants arrive here with their entire families. We are strangers even amongst others from the same country. Even within our communities, we can’t be vulnerable with each other about our family’s problems, our own health issues and speak our truth.

Some people still don’t accept this as a factor for problems. I have had someone tell me that we don’t need therapists; we can just sit down in front of cups of chai, talk it out, and we’ll be okay.

But if someone does want help, who can they turn to?

There’s a lack of mental health professionals who identify as people of color and understand the immigrant experience. Personally, I can remember not having the knowledge of where to start; finding a provider of color was like finding a needle in a haystack. Then there’s the waitlist, the list of emails in my inbox saying they are no longer accepting patients.

I believe our problem with seeking mental health care is two-fold: We don’t have spaces or opportunities to talk openly about our own mental health, and there just aren’t enough mental health professionals of color.

Faarah will be traveling this month to the 11th Annual Muslim Mental Health Conference in Tempe, AZ. Her insights from that conference will be published in our next newsletter.
Meet The Team

Jeremiah served on the Philanthropy and Policy Committee as a member of the NAMI Seattle board of directors in 2018. He has worked in mental health advocacy as a presenter for the NAMI In Our Own Voice program and served as a moderator at the NAMI Washington 2018 conference. Before joining NAMI Seattle, Jeremiah volunteered as a grant writer for LifeDesigns in Bloomington, Indiana, and as a networking assistant for New Leaf – New Life, an anti-recidivism organization supporting formerly incarcerated persons. Jeremiah has a BA in Anthropology from Indiana University.

Aislin has a BS in Health Sciences with a minor in psychology from Seattle Pacific University. She is passionate about increasing awareness of mental health conditions in youth. She has worked with adults and youth (13-17) experiencing mental health crises and a host of resulting issues including homelessness, substance abuse and involvement with the juvenile criminal justice system. In her spare time, she enjoys volunteering, playing with her dog and long distance running.

Muguette is a 20-year Seattle resident with a passion for children, education, social justice and mental wellness. She was born in Haiti; her family moved to New York City when she was a teenager. Her family was deeply impacted by members with mental illness. She believes the best way to eliminate stigma is to have honest conversations about mental illness. She graduated from Seattle University with a degree in International Business. In her spare time, she reads, cooks and volunteers.

Faarah has a BA in Psychology from the University of Washington. She very passionate about mental health care and its accessibility, especially in low-income communities where it is stigmatized. She spends a lot of her free time on volunteering in the Muslim community and enjoys spending time reading and watching cheesy romcoms.

Katie has served as NAMI Seattle’s Program Manager since November 2015. She holds a Master of Science in Social Work from the University of Texas at Austin, and her previous nonprofit work includes program coordination, outreach, and direct client services in women’s health, HIV, employment training, and community martial arts and self-defense.

Maddy wrote a paper titled “We’re All Mad Here: The Manifestations of Mental Illness in Theater,” and briefly speaking that is how her background in performing arts and marketing brought her to NAMI Seattle. When she’s not at NAMI, Maddy can be found at theaters around town (including Copious in Ballard) or at the dog park.
NAMI Washington offers trainings in NAMI Signature programs which allow local affiliates to bring NAMI programs to their communities. All trainings are offered at no cost to participants. All NAMI members or those becoming a member may apply to attend State Training programs. For more information, contact Deanna Roy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
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<td>MAY 18-19</td>
<td>YAKIMA</td>
<td>Click Here</td>
<td>MAY 3</td>
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<td>NAMI Connection</td>
<td>JULY 13-14</td>
<td>YAKIMA</td>
<td>Click Here</td>
<td>JUNE 14</td>
</tr>
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<td>YAKIMA</td>
<td>Click Here</td>
<td>JULY 19</td>
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<td>OCTOBER 26</td>
<td>YAKIMA</td>
<td>Click Here</td>
<td>SEPTEMBER 20</td>
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<tr>
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<td>SEPTEMBER 21-22</td>
<td>YAKIMA</td>
<td>Click Here</td>
<td>AUGUST 30</td>
</tr>
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<td>JULY 27-28</td>
<td>YAKIMA</td>
<td>Click Here</td>
<td>JUNE 7</td>
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<td>Click Here</td>
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<td>JULY 27-28</td>
<td>KIRKLAND</td>
<td>Click Here</td>
<td>JULY 12</td>
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<tr>
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<td>AUGUST 9-11</td>
<td>KIRKLAND</td>
<td>Click Here</td>
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<td>KIRKLAND</td>
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