Liz Birchen: Responding to the Need

Liz Birchen, a family support group leader and Family-to-Family teacher, is recipient of the 2016 Lifetime Volunteer Award. It is rare for a volunteer to take on both challenging positions. She was recognized at the NAMI St. Louis Annual Meeting on October 5.

A NAMI leader in the St. Charles area where she lives with her two grown sons who have mental illness, Liz has led a family support group since the late 1990s and has taught 13 Family-to-Family 12-week classes. When Liz joined NAMI, she saw there were no support groups in the St. Charles area. She took the two NAMI trainings and secured space for the support group at her church-Grace United Church of Christ.

Liz is an inspiration to fellow volunteers and program participants alike. Liz works closely with the Director of Programs, Joyce Johnston, who describes her as a person who truly lives the NAMI mission. She touches lives and provides hope and encouragement to families despite her own challenges which include losing her husband.

Last year, Liz received an Outstanding Family-to-Family Teacher Award and her length of service qualified her for the NAMI Hall of Fame. When asked why she volunteers, Liz simply says: I saw a need.

The Family-to-Family class provides:
• Up-to-date information about a range of mental illnesses, including co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders
• Skills related to crises management, solving problems and communicating effectively.
• Guidance on locating appropriate local supports and services.

Family Support groups meet monthly to provide caregivers a safe place to share their concerns and seek guidance from others who have been through similar experiences.

Classes and support groups are provided at no charge to the participants, thanks to the support of many donors.
we can do so much more because of you

Nothing is more important to our success than dedicated volunteers. Volunteers with the lived experience of mental illness are needed to lead support groups and classes—both for individuals with a diagnosis and for those who are caregivers and family members.

Volunteer opportunities for caregivers and family members include:
- Family-to-Family Course Teachers
- NAMI Basics Course Teachers
- Respite Providers for NAMI Basics courses and support groups
- Family Support Group Facilitators
- NAMI Basics Support Group Facilitators
- Substitute Instructors for Family-to-Family and Basics
- Family Member Mentors (open to graduates of Family to Family or Basics)

Volunteer opportunities for individuals with a diagnosis of mental illness include:
- NAMI Connection Support Group Facilitators
- In Our Own Voice Presenters
- Peer-to-Peer Facilitators
- Peer Mentors (open to graduates of Peer-to-Peer program)

Other volunteer opportunities include:
- Legislative Network
- HELPLine Phone Associate
- Special Events: Walk each May and Gala/Auction each November
- Board Members
- Ambassadors (represent NAMI St. Louis in the community)

Volunteers also needed for:
- Social Media
- Public Relations – Print Media
- Graphic Design

Better Together
By Dar Walker

NAMI St. Louis Represents Families and Individuals with Mental Illness in the Community. NAMI St. Louis mission includes outreach into the community to increase the understanding of mental illness and the effects it has on the individual, family and community. The purpose of this effort is to increase understanding and reduce stigma enabling compassionate support of individuals living with mental illnesses. One of the job requirements of NAMI St. Louis staff personnel is to collaborate with community organizations to represent the voices of families and individuals with mental illnesses to community organizations. NAMI St. Louis is the only collaborator or partner connected to social enterprises that speak for the family of those with mental illness. Thus I wanted to share with you all the community organizations that NAMI St. Louis personnel collaborate with on an ongoing basis. NAMI St. Louis staff participate as board directors, on steering committees, collaborators, advisors, lecturers, and other positions.

Adapt of Missouri
Advisory Council of Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services, Chair
Aetna
Alive & Well St. Louis Steering Committee
Allsup
Alpha Kappa Alpha
American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
American Academy of Pediatricians
Argent Capital
Behavioral Health Network of Greater St. Louis Community Advisory Council, Member
Behavioral Health Network of Greater St. Louis, Director
Behavioral Health Response
Boeing Corporation
Bridges to Care & Recovery Steering Committee, Member
Catholic Charities
CCRB Community and Children’s Resource Board of St. Charles County
CenterPointe Hospital
Central Trust
Christ Church
Christian Hospital
Clayton Behavioral
Commerce Trust
Community Council of St. Charles County
Comprehensive Mental Health Services
COMTREA
Crider Center
Dennis Fox & Associates
Elliot Chapel
Emerson Electric Inc.
Empower Missouri
Express Scripts
Family Advocacy and Community Training
First Congregational Church
FOX Sports Midwest
FOX2
Franklin County CIT Council
Grace United Church of Christ
Great Rivers CIT Council
Independence Center
Jefferson County CIT Council
Jobs with Justice
Johnson & Johnson Healthcare
Kirkwood United Methodist
Lindenwood University
Lutheran Family and Children’s Services
Magellan
Mental Health America of the Heartland
Mental Health America, Eastern Missouri
Mercy Behavioral Health
Metropolitan Volunteer Management Association
Missouri Budget Project
Missouri Department of Mental Health, Eastern District
Missouri Foundation for Health
Missouri Psychiatric Association
Missouri Telehealth Network
MO Coalition for Community Behavioral Health
MO Federation of Behavioral Health Advocates, Co-Chair
MO Health Advocacy Alliance, Member
MO Healthcare for All, Member
MO Primary Care Association
NAMI Executive Director’s Council
NAMI Missouri
National Institute for Mental Health
Oildom Publishing
Peace United Church of Christ
Places for People

Continued p. 2 >
This September four courageous individuals completed NAMI’s 10 week Peer-to-Peer class. The class helps individuals understand their illness and staying well including relapse prevention planning and self-advocacy.

Taught by two peers, Marion Endress and Sharon Lyons, who live with mental illness, the course has a core belief in sincere uncritical acceptance. People with all mental illnesses are welcomed. From this core belief an environment of trust can be established for the class.

“It is great to see people reaching out for knowledge and breaking down the isolation that frequently occurs with mental illness” said Lyons, NAMI St. Louis’ Director of Volunteers. Endress added: “After leading 3 sessions of Peer-to-Peer classes, I am more convinced than ever that NAMI programs are incredibly valuable tools an individual can have in their recovery “toolbox.” I hope to continue to lead this program with NAMI St. Louis for many years to come, knowing that, with each new group of class participants, I will learn more about myself and grow in my own recovery.”

The small class allowed for plenty of discussion time. In the 4th week of the 10-week program, each participant has the option of sharing their own story. By this point in the class, attendees have started to feel more comfortable with each other and with themselves. “This is my favorite week, said Endress, “because this is when we learn to appreciate the struggles each of us have been through and that, as one of the core philosophies of the program states, “We have more in common than not.” “By telling the story of my own recovery, I may be providing life-changing inspiration or hope to class participants just as I am changed and inspired by listening to every participant’s own story.”

In Our Own Voice Presentation
Tuesday, November 1, 2016 7:00pm-8:30pm
Grace United Church of Christ   8326 Mexico Rd  St. Peters, MO 63376

NAMI In Our Own Voice (IOOV) unmask mental illness, using speaker stories to illustrate the individual realities of living with mental illness. You gain a better understanding of what it is like to live with mental illness and stay in recovery. NAMI In Our Own Voice can change attitudes, preconceived notions and stereotypes regarding mental illness.

What You Should Expect
• The In Our Own Voice program and its impact on participant’s lives...in their own voice.
• Led by a team of two trained presenters who are living in recovery from mental illness.
• Includes stories, videos and discussion.

Why You Should Attend
• More accurate view of a stigmatized and misunderstood experience.
• Humanized perception of what people living with mental illness are like.
• Concrete examples of what living in recovery means.
• Opportunity to ask questions in a safe and friendly environment.

Whether you have contact with mental illness in a professional capacity or want to learn more on a personal level, your interest and questions are welcome. Your participation also provides a valuable opportunity to the speakers, an opportunity to gain confidence as they share their experience of recovery and transformation.

Need a speaker/presentation for your organization? IOOV speaker presentations are available upon request. Call Sharon at 314-962-4670.
“What I feel is inspired... Having this opportunity to be useful to those who call makes my life more meaningful and purposeful.”

When I tell people that I work on the Helpline at NAMI St. Louis each week, and I have been doing it for the past 12 years, the most common response is “Don’t you get very depressed?” Many assume that I listen to families and individuals struggling with the challenges of mental illness for endless hours, with few possibilities for solutions. It is true that people call the Helpline to get support and information to solve big problems; they don’t usually call to tell us how well things are going! But I don’t find it so depressing, on the whole. What I feel is inspired by their emotional generosity, their courage, their compassion for family members and themselves in the face of those difficulties. When a caller is really discouraged and feels stalled, sometimes I can think of a resource, referral or an idea that might move their situation in a more positive direction. Most of all, I am just happy that someone answers the phone and is willing to listen, that we don’t simply have an automated answering system that tells them “For help with support groups, press 1...” I think it matters that a living person responds to that call.

Over the years, thanks to the patience of my early Helpline volunteers Mary Beth Reynolds, Eva Bradin and Ann Sheehan, and thanks to the NAMI staff, I have gradually learned some helpful strategies and resources. In addition, this volunteer job has allowed me to meet terrific people at other mental health agencies – Places for People, Mental Health America, and Independence Center – who also offer services and ideas. I read as much as I can about mental illness, too. Having this opportunity to be useful to those who call makes my life more meaningful and purposeful.

Of course sometimes I am drained and frustrated on the Helpline, but isn’t that true of all work, paid and unpaid, which demands thought and emotional investment?

I wish Missouri was more committed to helping those with mental illness. I wish we could expand Medicaid to more people, and I wish we could make the tangle of insurance and pharmaceutical companies’ bureaucracies more manageable. We will continue to work for those improvements, but in the meantime, I will be grateful for this volunteer work and the chance to help those with mental illness build fuller lives. That is my response to the question, “Don’t you get very depressed?”

Ann Mandelstamm, Helpline Volunteer
Be a Star at the Gala!
Join us on the Red Carpet

Saturday, November 19 at the Hilton St. Louis Frontenac

RESERVE YOUR SEATS ONLINE AT WWW.NAMISTL.ORG/NAMI-GALA

We are pleased to announce the 2016 Gala Honorary Chairperson, Edgar M. (Ed) Purvis, Executive V.P. and Chief Operating Officer of Emerson and long-time supporter of NAMI St. Louis. The Annual Gala features an exciting evening of cocktails, dinner, shopping and celebrating!

This year’s gala theme is “Old Hollywood Glamour.” Come dressed as your favorite Hollywood Legend or in Glamour (Cocktail) Attire for your Red Carpet photo with “Marilyn Monroe.” Your silent auction shopping experience at the Gala will include themed baskets filled with treasures and unique items collected from many friends of NAMI St. Louis and businesses from all over St. Louis. Remember to bring your cell phone or tablet for mobile bidding – concierge bidders will also be available to assist you!

Tickets are available for $125 per guest and tables seat up to ten. Purchase seats online at www.namistl.org/nami-gala or contact Deanna Orf for more information. Phone 314-962-4670 or email deannaorf@namistl.org.

Thank you to our Presenting Sponsors:

EMERSON    EXPRESS SCRIPTS

And the Award Goes to...

Dr. Ujjwal Ramtekkar will receive the 2016 Exemplary Psychiatrist Award at the NAMI St. Louis Gala. To be considered for this Award, an individual must have set an example for his or her professional colleagues. NAMI recognizes those psychiatrists who have made substantial contributions to a NAMI Affiliate or NAMI State Organization. Dr. Ujjwal is in the company of exceptional psychiatrists selected from across the country through NAMI organizations nationwide. We are pleased to present him with this award at the Gala on Saturday, November 19, 2016.

Volunteer for the Gala!

Seeking enthusiastic volunteers to be our “spotters” during the Live Auction. Other opportunities to volunteer for this event include transporting event items and materials to the hotel on Friday 11/18, set-up and assisting with displays, decorations and centerpieces on Saturday morning, 11/19 and packing up at the end of the event. For more information, please contact Sharon Lyons, Director of Volunteers, at 314-962-4670 or by email at sharon@namistl.org.

Join our Basket Party!
Help us package beautiful displays for the auction!

Got a stash of empty baskets or containers in your closet waiting for a new home? Donate them for the gala.
Know Before You Go!

Are you prepared to vote in the November 8 election?

Before you go, where can you find out which officials will support your priorities? Where do the two parties stand on mental health issues? Find out about BOTH party positions on these issues at http://www.nami.org/About-NAMI/NAMI-News/2016-Election-Platforms. Voting is very important for people living with mental health conditions because many decisions about mental health services are made by elected officials, including who is eligible for Medicaid and what mental health services Medicaid will pay for. Decisions on what new mental health services will be funded are made annually. Additionally, many other decisions are made such as who should provide parity for mental health services in healthcare insurance policies and who will enforce it.

Please be prepared to vote on Tuesday, November 8 – it may help you or your loved one obtain mental health services needed! If you have any questions about voting or NAMI St. Louis’ priorities, contact Jackie Hudson at jhudson@namistl.org or 314-775-1600.

Your Voice Can Influence Change

The NAMI St. Louis Advocacy Committee guides and supports our efforts to voice priorities surrounding mental health issues. Your story is the most potent motivator for legislators; learn how to write and deliver a compelling version of your experience to influence change with NAMISmarts. Together we are making a difference and we want you on our team. Visit us at www.namistl.org/advocacy.

Mental Health Reform

S2680, the Mental Health Reform Act of 2016

1 in 5 Americans have a mental health condition. With the right care, recovery is possible. But, most people aren’t getting the care they need because America’s mental health system is broken.

HERE ARE THE FACTS:

• America’s suicide rate is the highest it’s been in 30 years.
• Half of Americans with mental illness did not get any mental health care in the past year.
• Mental health care is unfairly restricted by many health insurance plans.

FACTS ABOUT S2680

Passing a bill could help:

• Combat suicide in our schools and communities;
• Improve access to mental health care by increasing the number of mental health professionals; and
• Hold health insurance plans accountable for covering mental health fairly.
9 Ways to Have a Simpler but More Satisfying Holiday
“People often have an image of how the holidays should be,” according to Darlene Mininni, Ph.D, MPH, author of The Emotional Toolkit.

All those shoulds usually translate into pursuit of the perfect holiday. And since perfection is impossible, all we end up doing is getting disappointed and stressing ourselves out.

Keeping things simple this holiday season can help you stave off stress and focus on what counts. A simple holiday is one with fewer obligations and headaches and more relaxation and joy. Here are nine ways to enjoy just that.

1. Don’t take the holidays so seriously. Realistically, a lot can go wrong during the holidays. Keep a sense of perspective and humor about longer lines, parking lot traffic jams or burnt cookies.

2. Focus on what’s truly important. Sometimes, we get wrapped up in the superficial parts of the holidays. Take gift shopping, which is a big stressor and another way we complicate life for ourselves. “Relationships are the key to happiness, regardless of your income,” says Mininni. Ask yourself this year: “How can I use the holidays to strengthen my relationships with others?”

3. Simplify gift-giving. It’s the simple things – not extravagant gifts – that can help you deepen your connections with others.

4. Have potluck dinners. Not only do these events provide the opportunity to connect and make memories, but because everyone is pitching in, you only need to make one or two dishes.

5. Commit to less. The fewer commitments you make, the simpler your holiday will be. Overextending yourself just leaves you more stressed. (And a lot less fun to be around!)

6. Volunteer. “Giving to others and building a community strengthens your feelings of connection and your sense of happiness,” Mininni said. And it’s a simple way of making a big difference.

7. Ease your obligations. Each year many of us feel obligated to take on tasks like mailing greeting cards and getting the perfect holiday photos. Give yourself permission to simplify your to-do list to those that bring you joy.

8. Outsource. Remember that you don’t have to do everything yourself. Trade a task you love doing (cookies or shopping/gift wrapping) in exchange for the other stuff, such as cleaning, organizing or decorating. Hire a friend to decorate or a high school student to address your holiday cards.

9. Focus on the simple pleasures. The holidays are a great time to slow down and focus on the little joys in life. You also might enjoy reading with your family, listening to music together, looking at holiday decorations around town, baking cookies and playing outside.

Create your Lifetime Legacy. Remember NAMI St. Louis in your will or estate plans.
November 10, 2016

In Our Own Voice
Speakers: Mike and Donna Eisenbath, IOOV Speakers
Two individuals living with mental health conditions will present their stories of their dark days that eventually became successes and dreams... You won’t want to miss this one!

December 8, 2016

ABLE Accounts, What are they? How do they work?
Speaker: Martha C. Brown, CELA (Certified Elder Law Attorney)
This program will explain ABLE Accounts, which are being instituted by many states, including Illinois and Missouri. ABLE Accounts are similar to 529 plans. ABLE Accounts allow people with disabilities to have an ABLE Account and not be disqualified from SSI, Medicaid and other government programs.