

Support key to recovery from mental illness

Recovery from mental illness means different things for different people. It is a deeply personal, life-long journey usually beginning with clinical care to address the signs and symptoms. But it is often peer support that brings hope and understanding and motivates individuals and families to stay the path even when the going gets tough.

NAMI DuPage has been the voice of mental illness in DuPage County for the last 30 years and our model is based on peers helping peers, families helping families and parents helping parents. A mental health diagnosis brings with it the burden of isolation, hopelessness and even shame. Having a supportive, non-judgmental community that is not only accepting but is knowledgeable about the resources and help available is an invaluable aid in recovery. At NAMI DuPage we nurture this

support system and experience amazing stories of courage and triumph every day.

Chrissy is one such example — she went from needing our services to helping others like her. This is what she says about walking through the doors of the support group for the first time: “The minute I walked in I knew that here was a roomful of people just like me. For the first time since my teens, when I first started self-injury, I felt hopeful. By the end of that first session I realized that I had to play a bigger role in my own recovery.”

Today Chrissy is a facilitator for the same support group, and she even returned to the hospital where she was a patient to speak about her



Angela Adkins
On mental health

own recovery to empower others. Being able to say, “I have been there — I know how scary it is because I am one of you,” is a precious gift she can give to those still struggling.

Recovery from mental illness is not just for the individual but for the whole family. Without a strong support system, families are torn apart because of the financial and emotional consequences of having a loved one with mental illness.

Lisa is a family member with two grown siblings diagnosed with schizophrenia. This is what she says about the 12 week Family-to-Family class she participated in for family members and care givers

“Before Family-to-Family, we

were afraid, overwhelmed and ill-equipped to manage this crisis unfolding in our family. (This course) has provided our family with information and strategies to cope with our loved one’s diagnosis and truly understand mental illness and all the facets encompassing living with, emotionally supporting and advocating for our loved one.”

It is a proven fact that an educated and well-informed family member is an asset when it comes to recovery.

From support groups and hospital presentations to school programs and community education presentations, the ecosystems of support throughout the county created by NAMI DuPage are empowering individuals and families to advocate and take charge of their own recovery.

— *Angela Adkins is executive director of NAMI DuPage.*

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— **Chrissy**