



Montgomery
County MD

NAMI Montgomery County: Helping Those in Need

As we observe Mental Health Awareness Month this May, it is essential to recognize the critical role that the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Montgomery County (NAMI MC) plays in supporting individuals and families affected by mental health conditions in Montgomery County, Maryland. This role is more vital now than ever before because of the lasting effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on our community. For instance, it's estimated that roughly 1 in 5 of our family, friends, and neighbors now live with a mental health condition in Montgomery County, and people of all ages, races, religions, and ethnicities within our local community are affected.

That's exactly why in the past year alone, NAMI MC has expanded free, peer-led education sessions, increased free support groups, and trained additional volunteers to meet the increased demand for mental health support and resources. The local nonprofit is more dedicated now than ever before to improving the lives of Montgomery County residents affected by mental illness and striving to create a better tomorrow—a tomorrow where all people living with mental illness can experience hope, recovery, and wellness in a community free of stigma.

NAMI MC's meaningful impact on the Montgomery County community is undeniable. One such impact story is that of Megan, who recently learned about NAMI MC and the resources offered free of cost to community members. Megan had been struggling with symptoms of depression since the pandemic started and felt hopeless, isolated, and alone. She decided to attend one of NAMI MC's free educational courses and was amazed by the amount of information and support they provided. "NAMI Peer-to-Peer gave me hope when I was close to giving up. I realized that things can and do get better and that my mental health condition doesn't define me. I learned how to speak up for myself, build a strong support network and make plans for my future. I felt welcome and like I was among friends. Most importantly, I felt heard and understood."

Megan also joined a NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group and found comfort in being able to connect with others who understood what she was going through. "I benefited from being able to relate with others who share similar feelings, similar experiences, similar doubts, and similar helplessness about how to deal with mental illness. Thus, I don't feel so alone or like I have failed in some way."

Thanks to these free, inclusive, and accessible programs, Megan was able to receive the support she needed to manage her symptoms. She was so grateful for the positive impact NAMI MC had on her life that she wanted to give back to the organization. Megan is now a volunteer



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class teacher and helps others in the community who struggle with their mental health conditions.

This personal impact is why NAMI MC got started in the first place over four decades ago. NAMI MC was established in 1978 by five local families, seeking to support each other and educate others about mental illness. With little insight easily available, harsh existing approaches to treatment, and few current support services available at the time, the movement of families and caregivers seeking to cope with the mental illness of their loved ones grew throughout the local community. Today, NAMI Montgomery County has over 3,000 encounters with local individuals, caregivers, and allies in our community via support groups, classes, and resources.

Another meaningful impact story is that of Charles, a NAMI Family-to-Family class graduate, a NAMI Family Support Group participant, and a devoted father of an adult child now living independently with a mental illness. “My son’s mother passed away five years ago, and so we have been going through a lot of changes in our relationship trying to cope with everything, and it has been very overwhelming. Recently I’ve been able to regularly attend the NAMI Family Support Group, and I continue to find it very helpful. I have found that NAMI MC gives me more emotional tools for strengthening my relationship with my son, and that is probably the most important thing. Being able to speak about it in a NAMI MC support group makes us all feel like a community. It’s not just me.”

When other recent participants of NAMI MC support groups say things like, “I don’t have to pretend to be okay,” and “I’m not alone in my daily struggles,” it motivates staff and volunteers to continue fighting stigma, increasing understanding, and building these communities of peers. NAMI MC would not be what it is today without the Montgomery County community. Thanks to supportive volunteers, donors, and funders, the local nonprofit has been able to sustain and expand free programs offered to anyone seeking community, strength, and knowledge.

These personal stories show that the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Montgomery County is truly a life-changing organization that offers support, education, and resources for those affected by mental health conditions in our community. NAMI MC is inspired by program participants like Charles and Megan, and through its free programs, will always work towards improving the lives of those affected by mental illness in Montgomery County, Maryland, and ending the stigma surrounding it.

Thank you to the Healthcare Initiative Foundation (HIF) and all of our FY23 supporters for helping us to make Mental Health for All a reality in our local community this year. If you or someone you know is looking for free mental health support and resources, please visit namimc.org or send us an email at info@namimc.org. You are not alone.