

With more than 1,200 affiliates, NAMI is America's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to improving the lives of all individuals affected by mental illness.

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**NAMI Columbus**

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Teri Owens

**Georgia Crisis & Access Line**

Single Point of Entry to access mental health, addictive disease and crisis services 24/7/365  
Adults, Children & Adolescents  
1-800-715-4225

**Peer Support “Warm Line”**

1-888-945-1414 (toll-free)  
The Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network operates a state-funded, consumer-directed “warm line” for anyone struggling with mental health issues, 24 hours a day

**Columbus ACT Team**

AmericanWork, Inc.  
706-641-9663

## NAMI Columbus Virtual Support Group Meetings

NAMI Columbus **Family Support Group** meetings are now being held virtually. These meetings are on Monday evenings from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM via Zoom. We're happy to be able to once again offer facilitated support meetings for family members and friends of an individual with a mental health issue.

We hope you will join us for these Monday night FSG Zoom meetings. If you would like a meeting invitation to be sent to you, simply send your email address and cell phone number to:

Teresa O'Donnell, [tblankenkaker@gmail.com](mailto:tblankenkaker@gmail.com) or  
Tawana Farley, [farleytawana@yahoo.com](mailto:farleytawana@yahoo.com).

NAMI Columbus **Connection Recovery Support Group** meetings will continue to be held virtually at the following times:

- Saturdays 1:00pm – 2:30pm
- Thursdays 6:30pm – 8:00pm

Email Vanessa Vivas, [Vanessa.M.Vivas@gmail.com](mailto:Vanessa.M.Vivas@gmail.com) or Teresa O'Donnell, [tblankenkaker@gmail.com](mailto:tblankenkaker@gmail.com) for an invite/link to either group.

Please email at least 24 hours prior to the session.

### The NAMI Columbus Mission

We will use **Support**, **Education** and **Advocacy** to throw out lifelines of hope and help to families and consumers seeking recovery. Our vision is to create an effective and active affiliate which delivers what consumers of mental health services and families need. We work to build an area where leaders and citizens work well together to create a caring, compassionate and educated public that realizes mental illness is a biological illness and is not a character flaw or due to bad upbringing.

# Upcoming Trainings

February 2021
<b>Feb 19-21 – NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group Facilitator Training</b> <a href="#">Connection Support Group Facilitator Application</a>
March 2021
<b>Mar 12-14 – NAMI Family Support Group Facilitator Training</b> <a href="#">Family Support Group Facilitator Application</a>
April 2021
<b>Apr 17 – NAMI In Our Own Voice Presenter Training</b> (Candidates must complete an online training session before attending an in-person training) <a href="#">In Our Own Voice Presenter Application</a>
<b>Apr 24-25 – NAMI Family to Family Teacher Training</b> <a href="#">Family to Family Teacher Application</a>

Trainings are delivered online through the Zoom platform

Please note that all applicants must meet the following requirements:

1. Applicants must be current NAMI members.
2. Applicants must be actively involved in their local NAMI Georgia affiliate.
3. Applicants must be endorsed and approved by a NAMI Georgia Affiliate Board leader. A letter of recommendation from a NAMI affiliate leader must accompany your application.



## *In Memoriam* *Col. John (Jack) Fatum*

We are sad to announce the loss of one of our dear NAMI Columbus members, Col. Jack Fatum: February 1, 1927 – November 25, 2020. Jack was so well-respected in the Columbus area that he was included in a Ledger-Enquirer article on Dec. 31, 2020 as follows:

*“They died in 2020. Here’s the impact they had on the Columbus area.”*

*John "Jack" Fatum, 93, Nov. 25: “After 30 years in U.S. Army infantry and retiring as colonel, served as secretary of Columbus Lions Club, taught math in public and private high schools and was president of Georgia Alliance for the Mentally Ill and chairman of Fort Monmouth Boy Scouts Troop.”*

Jack had a huge role in bringing NAMI to Columbus, being the founder of our NAMI affiliate here in Columbus in 1983. (NAMI’s name was actually AMI then, which stood for “Alliance for the Mentally Ill”. Later it was changed to the familiar name we know today: NAMI.) As stated in the Ledger article, Jack also served on the State Board of Georgia AMI, which included several positions as well as President. Through the years, Jack was proud of our NAMI affiliate which became “NAMI Columbus”, keeping track of our progress and various outreach efforts in the community. Even after he was unable to attend our meetings, he still faithfully maintained his membership in NAMI Columbus over the decades. He was a dedicated & knowledgeable advocate for people who struggle with mental illness and their families. His dedication stemmed from a personal family connection, but spread to anyone anywhere who might be affected. He was known to reach out in caring, helpful ways to anyone in need, offering suggestions based on his knowledge and experience, or “digging” to find solutions for their need. He believed in volunteering and generously gave of his time and talents to our organization and others in many ways. He will be greatly missed!

We send our thoughts and prayers to Jack’s sons and to others in his family, along with each of you who are grieving his loss. If you would like to read more details about Jack’s interesting and impressive life, you can view his obituary and leave a message at this link: [John Fatum Obituary - Columbus, GA \(dignitymemorial.com\)](#)



# A Letter to Those Struggling with Mental Illness

JAN. 11, 2021

By Katherine Ponte, BA, JD, MBA, CPRP

Saying the right thing to someone struggling with mental illness can be incredibly powerful. It can support, comfort, encourage and sometimes even save a life. The problem is finding the words. Too many people don't know what to say to us, so they say nothing at all. Some people may worry about upsetting us. They don't know how to act in this often unfamiliar or uncomfortable situation. Some may simply not want to get involved.

Not acting can have significant consequences. Silence can make us feel hopeless, sad and alone. At its worst, we may think that others do not care or love us. This is especially true when our struggles are greatest — when we're hospitalized. This was my experience during my three hospitalizations for manic episodes. Like many others, I received minimal support from my family while in the hospital. Much time has passed, but I've never fully healed from these experiences.

This alienation is far less common for people hospitalized for a physical illness. For them, there are get well cards, flowers, balloons, teddy bears and sometimes even visitors overflowing from hospital rooms. They receive expressions of friendship, sympathy, comfort and support.

It should be the same for those hospitalized for mental illness. We should be treated no differently, but we are. A lack of acknowledgment or reassurance from others leaves us to dwell on "why?" We may believe it's because we are to blame for our own condition. Silence breeds uncertainty.

## Breaking The Silence

Having personally experienced the pain of being a psychiatric patient, I created [Psych Ward Greeting Cards](#), a program that visits and shares donated greeting cards with psychiatric patients. The messages can be very uplifting to recipients with expressions of hope, empathy, compassion, support, reassurance and recovery. The responses, especially from card recipients, to this small gesture have been deeply moving. They reinforce why I do this — I want my peers to know that people care about them, even strangers. I want them to know that they are not alone.

I know the power that the right heartfelt sentiment can have. I also know that it can be hard to find the right words. So, as an example, I am sharing my letter below to people struggling with mental illness. I hope my peers will read this message and know that it comes from the heart, from someone who understands their struggles. I hope that those who support someone with mental illness, but might need a little help with what to say, share it with their loved one, too. Let them know it comes from a peer who cares, who gets it, who wants to see them well.

Dear friend,

I know that things may be hard right now. You may be feeling hopeless, sad, lonely or isolated. But you do have reason to hope. We always do. Mental illness blinds us to this reality. You may think that nobody could understand what you're going through. But many do because they have been there, too. I can.

I have suffered from mental illness for a long time. I know how hard it can be. I also know that treatment can work and recovery is possible. First, you may need to come to terms with a few things. You are not a burden. Your loved ones will not leave you. You are not to blame for your illness. It was not anything you did or said. Mental illness happens to a lot of us.

We are beautiful people, kind and empathetic. It's true, certainly no less than everyone else. And you are brave and courageous. Many people admire you. You should be proud to live with mental illness day-by-day. It is an achievement. You must believe that you are strong. You are. Mental illness may have made you stronger than most.

But still, there is stigma. It can really hurt. It says terrible, awful things about us. It holds us back, but it doesn't realize how resilient we are. Stigma lies. Don't believe any of it. Stigma is a bully. Stand up and it will shrink. You must listen to what you know is true deep down within you, not a bully's empty bluster. I know you know the truth about you. A lot of people do.

You deserve so much more than being sick. You deserve to live a life full of happiness. You have dreams to pursue, and you can reach them. To do this, you have to believe in yourself. You have to love yourself to know that you're worthy of more. Believe in hope. It is all around you. If you cannot find your own hope, find hope in your loved ones. There are so many people who know you can and will get better, including your peers. We believe in you.

Please believe me when I tell you that today is not your forever.

But only you can change your life for the better. You have to take responsibility for your condition, find the best treatment, be adherent, ask for and accept help, listen to good advice from those who love you. Take care of yourself with sleep, diet and exercise. Find out what gives you meaning and purpose in your life — a career, good relationships, happiness — and pursue it.

Recovery can be hard to reach. It was for me. But the rewards are great. You may make mistakes, experience setbacks and disappointments, and get discouraged. We all do. But that's all part of the journey. Recovery is not a straight path. You must never give up. Every step will make you stronger and stronger.

It's really just a matter of time before you reach recovery, but you need to be patient and cautious. Even if you've been suffering for a long time, you can still get better. Be inspired by your peers. I struggled for a long time but I reached recovery. Many people living with mental illness have, and you can, too.

Much better days lie ahead for you. Love yourself. Know that you are loved, worthy, deserving and capable. You've got what it takes. We're all rooting for you and need you. We'll be with you every step of the way, in our thoughts and hearts. We believe in you. You have to believe in you, too.

Love, your friend, your peer, Katherine



# Understanding the Symptoms of BPD

*FEB. 03, 2021*  
*By Ashley Nestler*



As a woman living with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), and as a mental health professional, I have researched the disorder significantly to better understand it. As one of the most stigmatized mental health conditions, BPD is not covered extensively when in school for a mental health profession. This causes a disservice to those who live with the illness and the mental health professionals who treat them. Especially considering the vast range of signs and symptoms associated with BPD.

A large part of the problem is the level of stigma embedded in the way we talk about and define BPD symptoms — i.e. mercurial, superficial, impulsive, highly manipulative of others, etc. You can tell how stigmatized they are just by the way they are described, such as the symptom of “attention-seeking behaviors,” which invalidates the turmoil a person with BPD goes through.

The symptoms of BPD are often seen as exaggerative or abrasive, which can compromise the accessibility of treatment and the accuracy of diagnoses. It took me many years to be properly diagnosed and treated, which is very common for people with this illness.

One of the best ways to create more understanding and empathy is to take a step back and try to understand the underlying causes of BPD symptoms.



What Are The Underlying Causes?

Most individuals with BPD have experienced some form of abuse, neglect and/or abandonment at some point in their lives, with many experiencing this abuse during childhood. Any form of abuse can lead to an inability to manage one’s emotions or create trust or secure relationships with others.

Now, imagine having experienced abuse, neglect or abandonment and trying to navigate the world as an adult when you don’t know how to regulate or express your emotions or connect with others in a healthy way. Understanding the abuse that often lies beneath BPD is imperative to creating acceptance and tackling the stigma surrounding this illness.

Many individuals who live with borderline personality disorder may not understand their impulsive or manipulative actions, and many do not see their actions until they are pointed out to them. That’s how it was for me.

Before treatment, I was flirtatious with others to try to find some form of acceptance or validation, and I would struggle with impulsive shopping and high peaks of energy and intense boredom. I had many superficial relationships because of how hard it was to trust others, and I experienced strong mood swings because of how abuse impacted my ability to express myself safely.

I still struggle with these symptoms from time to time, but learning strategies on how to regulate my emotions helped me manage my impulsivity in relationships and with money. Additionally, helping my loved ones understand my illness has strengthened my relationships, and that connection is so important when it comes to BPD.

There are so many underlying causes for developing borderline personality disorder, but I find that the symptoms that are most stigmatized cause professionals and others to avoid individuals with the condition. It is imperative that we rewrite the script and understand the abuse, neglect and abandonment that many people with BPD have experienced.

By starting the discussion with the causes, and not just the symptoms, we can create empathy and provide more treatment options for people with this mental illness.



Virtual

July 27 – 28

NAMICon 2021

Bringing People Together  
for Mental Health

NAMICon 2021 Event Dates Announced!

A bright spot in a year defined by distance, isolation and adversity was the success of NAMICon 2020, our first virtual national convention. The online event allowed NAMI to expand our national reach globally. With more than 12,500 attendees and 37 countries represented, NAMI shared important resources, research updates and programming to our broadest community of individuals, families, friends, allies and advocates ever.

As we look ahead to 2021 with the promise of reconnecting and renewed possibilities, we are excited to once again present **NAMICon 2021 virtually July 27-28!**

If you are interested in viewing on-demand sessions and workshops from our 2020 event, visit [2020 Virtual NAMICon](#).



# Columbus

P.O. Box 8581  
Columbus, GA 31908  
(706) 320-3755  
**Our Area's Voice on Mental Illness**



Many people find their way to our classes by first attending a support group. If you are a NAMI Columbus "long timer" (we don't want to call you old), please attend either of the two weekly NAMI Connection support groups or the weekly Family support group. Newcomers can use your wisdom and hard-earned experience. Sharing a message of recovery gives the hope they are searching for. Many people tell us that the NAMI motto **"You Are Not Alone"** is the initial feeling they realize at their first meeting. If you are willing to train to be a support group facilitator, let us know!

## I want to support NAMI Columbus and NAMI's mission.

*✂ Please Cut and Mail ✂*

Name

Address

City State Zip

Phone Numbers (do not enter a number if you do not want to be listed in the Membership Directory (members only).)

E-Mail (Please include so we can be green and email you our monthly newsletter.)

### Please check type of membership desired:

- ☐ Individual Membership - \$40 Dues
- ☐ Household Membership - \$60 Dues
- ☒ **\$5 Open Door Membership (financial hardship)**  
(All dues are for 1 year and are tax-deductible.)

**All memberships include NAMI National, NAMI Georgia, and NAMI Columbus membership.**

- ☐ I am not joining at this time, but I would like to make a contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_. (Thank you!!!)

NAMI National, NAMI Georgia and NAMI Columbus are dedicated to eradicating stigma and improving the lives of persons with mental illnesses thereby also benefiting their friends, family and community. Catch the wave and be a part of change.

NAMI Columbus is an affiliate of NAMI Georgia, which is a 501(c)3 non-profit charitable organization. Dues and donations are tax deductible. Membership includes a subscription to our monthly newsletter and access to immediate news on advocacy, treatment and support issues from our national, state and local organizations.

Please make checks payable to:  
**NAMI Georgia** & enter **"NAMI Columbus membership"** in the memo field.

Mail your check and membership form to:  
**NAMI Columbus**  
P.O. Box 8581  
Columbus, Georgia 31908

You can also join safely online at [www.nami.org/join](http://www.nami.org/join) .