



# GAMIGRAM

## Dates and Events

### SHARE AND CARE

Do you need someone to talk to? Would you like some of your questions about mental illness answered? Our support group for family and friends of the mentally ill meets **every** Tuesday at 6:00 PM at Arden House, 1552 Colorado Street, Glendale, at the corner of Colorado and Lincoln. We encourage you to come. Limited parking is available on the street. Please enter through the front door.

### MONTHLY NAMI MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Tuesday, October 2, 2007, 6:15 pm.  
Speaker: Lynn Brandstater

Lynn Brandstater, executive director of Verdugo Mental Health, will update NAMI Glendale members on the progress of the new facility being built behind the old facility. She will also talk about VMH programs sponsored through a donation from NAMI Glendale. **For this night only, the speaker will precede Share and Care.**

### NAMI Glendale to Sponsor Outreach and Education Event for CANVAS Opening

The membership of NAMI Glendale approved an expenditure of \$5850 to sponsor a special screening on opening night of CANVAS at Sunset Laemmle in West Hollywood on October 19, 2007.

“CANVAS,” a new independent film directed by NAMI Member Joe D. Grecco and starring Joe Pantoliano and Marcia Gay Harden, offers a sensitive, informed, and realistic picture of schizophrenia.

In an effort to fight stigma and educate the public, NAMI Glendale in collaboration with Screen Actor’s Guild Foundation will host a screening followed by a Q & A with the director and actors from the film. NAMI Glendale will also provide literature to inform the public of the many support and education programs in our community.

SAG Foundation will reach over 17,000 members through e-mail and website in an effort to promote this film. It is imperative that people see the film on opening weekend in order to ensure an extended run. NARSAD has sponsored its opening in Los Angeles.

Make sure to see “CANVAS” on opening weekend with all your friends. For more information on the film visit [www.canvasthefilm.com](http://www.canvasthefilm.com).

## WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Jonée Shady

October will mark the fourth year of NAMI Walks LA. I'm walking, are you? October will mark another birthday for me. What a great gift for you to walk with me. October contains a week of Mental Illness Awareness (October 7-13) and a day of Bipolar Awareness Day (October 11). Spread the word by fighting stigma; tell your stories. It seems to get easier and easier to mention that I have a brother who has schizophrenia. You know what? People have been receptive and listen to my story. I know that every time I engage in a conversation with my brother as the topic, I am fighting stigma. Every time I hear someone use the term schizophrenic as an adjective for someone's behavior who isn't actually sick, I know we have work to do. I know that our family members are struggling just to help their loved ones and may not feel they can find time or energy to advocate for Mental Illness issues. But even talking about your situation is a way to fight stigma. I have found in the last few years that people are receptive, will listen, and even express empathy. There seems to be a thirst for knowledge and truth about the subject. When this occurs, I know that I am doing my part. Not all of us has the time to volunteer, write letters, or even walk next week in Santa Monica as we are too busy caring for our relatives. But talking helps everyone who struggles with the every day concerns of those living with severe brain disorders.

Now for those of you who have helped this affiliate in so many ways, I must thank you from the bottom of my heart. Coming to meetings when things are okay helps others who are struggling to cope. Answering phones for strangers in crisis seeking assistance; contacting outside venues for future NAMI Programs, serving as facilitator for our weekly support groups; teaching Family-to-Family; manning a table at health fairs; being a team captain for NAMI Walks; walking for the Mind of America; serving on a committee; serving on the Board of NAMI Glendale. These are a few examples of the services our

volunteers at NAMI Glendale have performed over the last year and I am extremely grateful to be part of this organization that I consider my family.

I ask you now to consider becoming part of the NAMI family in a different way. Next month we must announce candidates to run for next year's board of directors. We need to nominate a President, Vice-President, Secretary, Recording Secretary, and Treasurer. Duties of these officers are listed at the end of this article. If you are interested in serving please let us know.

I have served the last three years as President and nothing could have been more rewarding. I have met so many people and made many new friends. I feel I have made a difference and hope to continue to do so. Of course there is always room for improvement and I know that you too can make a difference if you participate on our NAMI Glendale Board. It's not all work and no play; believe me there is always room for play. I thank you for all the support you have shown me the last three years and hope to see a wonderful slate of candidates to continue in the NAMI Glendale tradition, supporting and educating our community classes and groups; attending trainings for the.

SOMETHING ON YOUR MIND?  
JOIN THE GLENDALE NAMI BLOG AND  
SHARE.  
[WWW.NAMIGLENDALE.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://WWW.NAMIGLENDALE.BLOGSPOT.COM)

**RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORITY OF OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES:**

**PRESIDENT:**

1. Responsibility:
    - A. To provide a suitable meeting place for all meetings of the general membership, for the Board meetings, and for Share and Care meetings.
    - B. To select Chairpersons for the Standing Committees and the special committees.
    - C. To call and chair the general membership business meetings as determined by the President and/or the Board.
    - D. To call and chair board meetings at least twice a year.
    - E. To serve as an ex-officio member of all committees.
    - F. To give an annual report to the general membership on the accomplishments of the past year and the goals and plans for the coming year.
    - G. To approve and/or sign all official correspondence from the Organization.
    - H. To attend, or send a representative to, the monthly Los Angeles County Coordinating Committee Meetings.
    - I. To attend, or send a representative to, the monthly meeting of the Verdugo Mental Health Board
    - J. Authority:
    - K. Under Robert's Rules of Order, as Chair of the general business meetings and the Board meetings.
    - L. To establish special committees and appoint the Chairperson of each committee.
    - M. To represent the Organization as its official spokesperson.
    - N. To commit the Organization to activities and programs not in conflict with the purpose and the ability of the Organization.
    - O. To delegate this authority to others when not in conflict with the by-laws or specified directives of the Board.
- To be a signatory with other officers with the organization's depositories of funds.

**VICE PRESIDENT:**

1. Responsibility
    - A. To assume the responsibility of the Presidency during the official absence of the President and when this assumption of duty is appropriate.
    - B. To assist the President in running the organization by serving as his first proxy at Board and Committee meetings.
- To serve as the Chairperson of the Program Committee or to appoint someone to chair the Committee.

**CORRESPONDING SECRETARY:**

2. Authority
    - A. To format and store the official correspondence of the Organization
    - B. To expend petty cash for necessary supplies associated with the office.
- To delegate this authority to others when not in conflict with the by-laws or specific directives of the Board.

**TREASURER:**

1. Responsibility:
    - A. To safe keep and account for the funds and financial records of the Organization.
    - B. To keep a permanent record of all expenditures and receipts of the Organization.
    - C. To be prepared to report the financial condition of the Organization at business meetings and to make such reports at the request of the President.
    - D. To prepare and present an annual financial report at the business meetings.
- To prepare and present such interim financial reports as requested by the President and any authorized Chairperson.

**Guest Column**  
**Walking the Thin Line Between Rescue and Self-Help**

**Sharon S. Dunas, MFT, President**  
NAMI Westside LA

When I reflect on families struggling with the unpredictability of a family member with mental illness, I think about swimming upstream in a river filled with ice floes. I think of family members and acquaintances only too willing to blame parents or spouses for a relative's illness. Some tell us our relative is ill because we are too engulfing or too controlling. Others offer advice we did not seek. How many of you are told to let go of your relative and let the chips fall where they may? Our attachment often does not allow us to do that. We keep trying to coax our mentally ill relative into treatment.

How do we cope and traverse the minefield of mental illness? Our natural instinct is to protect our loved ones at all costs. On this, the Spitz studies are instructive. University psychologist Spitz built a wire box whose floor was a mine field of electric shocks. He put mother monkeys and father monkeys at opposite ends of the box, then shocked the male monkeys' paws until their faces showed signs of distress. The mother monkeys ventured onto the shock field to help, until the shocks on their own paws stopped them. Next, the experimenter put baby monkeys at the other end of the box from the mothers. When the mother monkeys saw their babies' distress when their paws were shocked, the mothers crossed the entire shock field to rescue their babies. The experiment was not repeated with father monkeys and babies.

Like those mother monkeys, when we humans see our children or any significant others suffer from mental illness, our instinct is to rescue them at any cost. We get involved and stay involved, trying to help our mentally ill relative, whether they lack insight, are in prison, homeless, psychotic, or whatever. We continue to hope, encourage, cajole, bribe and plead them into safety and improved quality of life. We go to any length to get them into medical treatment, self-help groups and psycho-social development.

I have a relevant story for you to contemplate. A couple of years ago, a beautiful young woman spoke to NAMI-WLA about her experience of continuous depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and inner voices that told her she must die. Her illness so debilitated her that she hid behind her bed or stayed in the closet with severe agoraphobia. Her mother cared for, nursed, encouraged, and pleaded with her for years. Then one day, her mother came into her bedroom and stated, "I cannot do this anymore. I am not going to assume responsibility for getting you well." She went out, got a

full time job and left her daughter on her own.

This panic-stricken, depressed young woman continued to hide out in her room for a time. Then, one day, she woke up, "It is up to me if I am to have a life. Life won't care if I miss it and I am missing life." Bit by bit, this young woman managed to leave her room, make her meals, sit on the front porch. She noticed when she changed her diet and gave up sugar and caffeine, she felt less panicky. She noticed when she could walk a bit and focus on other things, she felt less terror. She noticed that when she walked a mile a day, she got much better. She began a routine of healthy breathing, deep breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, and staying on her medications. She got better. Bit by bit, she improved the quality of her life by herself. This woman is now acting on stage and has continual speaking engagements about her recovery. In the words of Emerson, "We become what we think about all day long." This woman trained her brain to focus on wellness and recovery and she recovered, as many other consumers do today.

I learned that when my daughter was most depressed, psychotic, and even suicidal, it was better for her if I "let go." When her UCLA psychiatrist said I had to let go after her suicide attempt, I thought that he was crazy, but I begin to ruminate on his suggestion. Ultimately, I decided to let go and attempt to show her that life was worth living. I went to Nepal, hiked through the Himalayas and studied Buddhism.

I did not know if she would be dead or alive when I returned. I knew she was in a life-death struggle in her illness, but I also knew that it was her life and that she would have to make decisions about her own life, not me. She felt anything I said as intervening. The most difficult thing I ever did was to board a plane for Nepal during this crisis in my daughter's life. I cried all the way to the Orient.

I had invited her to come with me to the Himalayas, but she wouldn't follow hospital protocol, so she had to stay locked up, for three years. I wrote her letters about the beauty of Nepal, hoping that she would want a better life than living in hospitals. A few months after my trip, she started doing the necessary things to have a better life. It took two more years of doing the right things before her recovery really began. Today, my daughter stays on her meds, does yoga, goes for hikes, and leads a relatively healthy life.

What can we do to cope and find balance? Do we continue attempting to help when they refuse treatment, or do we surrender and let them find their own path? For most, our instincts tell us to hold on tight. We each must decide how we walk the thin line between holding on and letting go. We each must find our own comfort level in our own time. We cannot follow advice that is

not a fit for us. Perhaps this is our most profound spiritual lesson – how to walk this line - and our relatives are our best teachers. The truth is, we cannot manage the outcome of our relative’s brain illness, or any illness for that matter.

“To let go does not mean to stop caring; it means I cannot do it for someone else. To let go is not to cut myself off; it means I cannot do it for another. To let go is to recognize that the outcome is not in my hands. To let go is to fear less and to love more.” These words are from 12 Step groups and NAMI Family-to-Family, Class 12. Perhaps what this means is to love ourselves more. That can be a hard task for many of us with mentally ill relatives.

“Each morning we are born again.  
What we do today is what matters most.” Buddha

#### L.E.A.P.

#### Four Steps to Creating a Treatment Agreement

**Listen.** The first step involves walking in the other person’s shoes to gain a clear idea of her experience of the illness and treatment.

**Empathize.** If you want someone to seriously consider your point of view, be certain he feels you have seriously considered his.

**Agree.** Your focus is on making observations together, identifying facts that you can ultimately agree upon.

**Partnership.** The aim of this step is to help you to collaborate in accomplishing the goals you agreed upon.

From *I Am Not Sick* by Xavier Amador



**The GAMlgram, the Community’s Voice on Mental Illness, is published by NAMI Glendale to educate its members and the general public about issues affecting the mentally ill.**

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## Our Member’s Voices

The Department of Personnel for the county has started a News Letter that goes out to all County employees. In the first issue they listed all the illnesses the news letter would cover. Mental health was not on the list. I sent an email questioning why mental illness was not on their list, asked if it was because it is a shameful topic. I never got an answer to my email. This month’s news letter was totally on mental illness giving all sorts of information to the employees. I sent another email saying thank you and how I thought my email had fallen on deaf ears and how I was surprised with this month’s news letter.

I just wanted to say that I learned from the support groups that I could speak up without shame. Again, I want to say thank you for the Glendale support group.

We should never miss an opportunity to speak up.

Carmen

## When Privacy Laws Go Too Far

Commentary by Mike Miller

Case law gives us a federal right to privacy under the United States Constitution and California provides for that “right” in the wording of the State Constitution. Both the federal government and state of California have various statutes that set forth rights of privacy and confidentiality in different contexts. Ideally, these rights are important: They incorporate the “right to be left alone” and try to protect us from unwanted and unnecessary intrusions into our private lives, including our health and financial lives.

California has a number of privacy statutes that cover different subjects from employment to medical. They try to strike a balance between the provision of information and the right to privacy, but in the area of mental illness there is a serious need to revisit the law and provide a new way of handling certain alleged privacy issues.

A current portrayal of the privacy law crisis is set forth in the September 3, 2007 Health Section of the *Los Angeles Times*. Times staff writer Shari Roan points out the “crisis on campus” highlighted dramatically by the recent Virginia Tech massacre and the follow up recommendations that the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) be amended to make explicit that parents can be notified and information shared about troubled students. A related government report advised that college officials, doctors, therapists, and police rarely share information about “troubled” students with their parents or guardians because they fear violating confidentiality laws. Concerning the Virginia Tech killings, a State panel investigating the incident concluded, in part, that “a misunderstanding of federal privacy laws among Virginia Tech officials, including a failure to notify his parents, was a major reason why Mr. Cho did not receive sustained mental health counseling that might have prevented his rampage.”

A common scenario reported in the *Times* article concerns the 18 year old who goes off to college and then manifests serious mental health problems. These problems can involve long absences from class, inactivity, aberrant behavior, and related problems. Are the parents informed? Usually not! School officials will say, “Your child is an adult and has not agreed for us to disclose anything.”

The above examples highlighted by the media are just a tip of the iceberg. Most NAMI meetings, at one time or another, involve some issues that pertain to privacy rights and the related problems caused by the privacy laws in relation to helping those with mental illness. For example, a 19 year old with schizophrenia disappears from his parents. The group care home where he lived and the agency responsible for his disability payments do not give information to the parent searching for the child. Yes, he may be 19, but he is someone’s child and that

parent is the one who can really help in a crisis.

Another typical example involves the medical personnel who do not disclose key information discovered during an examination to custodial parents who can help a loved one because the information is deemed to be legally confidential. When I hear these type of stories at NAMI meetings, as a parent (and lawyer), I remind the participants that their loved ones can “waive” their privacy rights. Usually this requires a written waiver to the doctor, but some doctors I know have accepted a verbal waiver from the patient. I also know of some medical personnel who fortunately are more practical than paranoid and will impart some information they believe will help their patient. In addition, if the parent or guardian is aware of certain information about their loved one, such as recent behavior and symptoms that the medical people should know, I have imparted that information by phone or letter to the treating personnel.

This is particularly important in those situations where the person being treated does not always tell everything, or is unaware of what he or she told the doctor or therapist. Let’s face it. We are trying to help our loved ones and should err on the side of disclosure. Likewise, for doctors and other personnel including law enforcement. Instead, too often, there is silence in the face of laws that are short sighted.

I am not imparting legal advice. People who are concerned, but unsure, should consult professionals about their situation. Do not be afraid to discuss this with those who handle and treat your loved one. Together you may be able to craft a workable solution to resolve these issues. I am, however, imparting legislative advice: The laws involving privacy need to be revamped in ways that will deal with the reality of the problem. For example, Congress is beginning work on the Mental Health Security for America’s Families in Education Act. This bill would clarify FERPA by stating that if a licensed mental health professional certifies that a student is a risk to himself or others, the school may inform a parent or guardian.

Corrective legislation is necessary. NAMI and other similar organizations should consider statutory amendments to address the problems. California’s privacy statutes should be revamped to deal with the unique situations faced by the mental health dilemma. A dilemma whereby those who need help cannot get it from those who can help because the latter are deprived of information about the person in need, a person who, in many cases, has no concern or awareness with regard to privacy rights. They may be homeless and hungry, lost, dropped out, but no one will tell those who care because of the existing law. In future Commentaries I will discuss possible legislative alternatives.




## Verdugo Mental Health News

Lynn Brandstater and Dorothy Meyer

NAMI Glendale's gift to Verdugo Mental Health is being utilized equally between two programs, the Skill Building Institute and Clients Helping Clients. For the Skills Building Institute, \$2500 of the gift is being shared among the six courses in the semester (\$99 each) to purchase supplies that no other funding source can provide. As a start in Clients Helping Clients, a portion of the remaining gift is being used between CHC and the Art and Painting group to produce a VMH calendar to help clients (and staff) stay organized and on top of opportunities next year. The NAMI Glendale gift is so helpful because there is no administrative overhead or bureaucratic snafus to deal with; every dollar goes to the programs and client support.

Again this year, VMH is participating in the Glendale Kiwanis Incredible Duck Splash on October 20 at Verdugo Park. Your feet will be recovered from the NAMI Walk by then so head to the park for fun. VMH is one of many nonprofit organizations that will benefit from this annual event. Ducks can be "adopted" for \$5 each at [www.ducks4kids.org](http://www.ducks4kids.org). VMH will receive credit and an actual donation.

Lynn Brandstater will be the speaker at NAMI Glendale on October 2 to answer your questions and talk about the new building and programs.



**JOIN NAMI – YOU ARE NOT ALONE**  
**\$35.00 PER INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY**

**MEMBERSHIP MAKES YOU A MEMBER OF THE STATE AND NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS.**

Please make checks payable to:  
**NAMI Glendale**

Mail to: NAMI Glendale Treasurer, Wayne Baldaro,  
c/o Verdugo Mental Health, 1540 E. Colorado,  
Glendale, CA 91205.

**GAMlgram only - \$10.00**

[www.namiglendale.org](http://www.namiglendale.org)

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