
NAMI EAST BAY NEWSLETTER

A local affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

March-April 2016

Rebecca Woolis: 35 Years of Mental Health Practice

Wednesday, March 23

We are thrilled that our old friend **Rebecca Woolis**, author of the oft-recommended *When Someone You Love Has a Mental Illness*, will be joining us at our March general meeting. Rebecca was trained as a social worker and, besides writing a book that has been published in multiple editions including Spanish, has had a private practice in Berkeley, administered the Berkeley Wellness Center through Bonita House, helped organize and present the family perspective at FERC panels for providers, and has been involved in many other county projects. We've asked her to reflect on her 35 years of practice, both in and outside of the system, and consider changes she's seen and those she wishes to see. We anticipate a casual evening, with good discussion and ample interactive time through questions and answers.

Speaker Meeting starts at 7:30 pm

Albany United Methodist Church
980 Stannage Avenue, Albany
Corner of Stannage and Marin

Meeting is free and open to the public.

Support Meetings

NAMI East Bay offers the following monthly support meetings:

- **Support and Share Group for Families of Adults** is held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month. The next meetings are March 9, April 13, May 11.
- **Support and Share Group for Families of Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults** is held on the 3rd Tuesday of the month: March 15, April 19, May 17.

Support Group Meetings are held at the Albany United Methodist Church, 7-9 pm. Enter through the gates to the right of the door on Stannage Avenue,

turn left through the large room, go down the hall, and come up the stairs. Signs will be posted.

All support meetings are free to NAMI members and non-members, offering a chance to talk with others who understand, give emotional support, and share ways they have found to cope.

Schedules for Hearing Voices Network

The Hearing Voices Network is comprised of people (and their families) who see, hear, feel, and think things that others may not experience. Check website at www.bayareahearingvoices.org or Facebook at www.facebook.com/bayareahearingvoices. Or contact Ed Herzog at edherzog@comcast.net.

Voices, Visions, and Different Realities: groups for consumers, drop-ins welcome: Mondays, 6-8 pm, North Berkeley Senior Center, 1901 Hearst Avenue, Berkeley (10 minute walk from closest BART stations), sponsored by Berkeley Mental Health. Facilitators are individuals with lived experience.

Group for family members: Third Thursdays, 6:30-8 pm, NAMI East Bay offices, 980 Stannage Avenue, Albany.

Family Night

Our next Family Night will be Monday, April 18, at the NAMI East Bay offices, 5-8pm. We will provide games, prizes, conversations, activities such as adult coloring books, pizza and salad, and beverages. The content of these get-togethers varies, depending on the interests of attendees. We are looking forward to holding them outdoors when the weather is more predictable. It is necessary to pre-register so we know how much pizza to order, so let us know by the preceding Friday if you'll be joining us.

Disability Rights

If you have experienced problems with charter schools and their handling of students with disabilities, please contact Kyle Ruiz at kruiz@dralegal.org.

SPEAKER NOTES

Panel Discussion: Community Collaborators and Resources

Summarized by Thomas T. Thomas

In our vibrant urban community, many agencies that don't have the words "mental illness" in their names still provide relevant and significant services to both families and consumers. Sometimes NAMI East Bay learns about them from others or through sharing spaces at health fairs or the Solano Stroll. With that in mind, our January 27 meeting invited representatives from different community resources to give short presentations and answer questions. Among the presenters were:

- **Benjamin Blake**, Chief Program Officer, and **Jovan Yglecias**, Director of Programs, from Bay Area Community Services (BACS).
- **Jenny Zegarra**, Bilingual Spanish Registry Coordinator, from Public Authority for In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS).
- **Robin Earth**, Information and Referral Specialist, from Center for Independent Living, Inc. (CIL).
- **Sarah**, a member of Al-Anon, a group for families and friends of alcoholics and drug users.
- **Liz Rebensdorf**, NAMI East Bay President and a board member for Mental Health Association of Alameda County (MHAAC).

Bay Area Community Services

BACS is a heritage agency in Oakland and Alameda County going back to 1953 and offering Wellness Co-op services since 1969. The agency runs a variety of programs in the "continuum of ease," including crisis care at Woodrow House in Hayward, offering short-term housing to help people with severe mental illness avoid hospitalization; case management programs at various sites; and Wellness Centers in Oakland, Hayward, Fremont, and Pleasanton. They generally serve adults 18 years and up, although BACS does have a transition-age youth program at Towne House in Oakland.

The Wellness Centers offer groups and activities, Blake said, including classes in cooking, shopping, budgeting, art, and music. There's even a drum circle. "These activities are directed by the people who

participate and share similar experiences," he said. The centers do not offer day treatment, although BACS runs an adult day program, Aging with Independence, in Oakland and Fremont for elders with memory disorders.

The Wellness Centers are open 8:30 to 6:30 every day, including Saturdays and holidays. The difference between BACS's Wellness Co-op model and the clubhouse model offered by other agencies is that the Wellness Centers require no referral. The consumer just walks in the door.

And BACS has a "No Wrong Door" policy, Yglecias said. Anyone, whether a county resident or not, can come into one of the Wellness Centers and be served. If a person needs psychiatric help, he or she can make an appointment with one of the psychiatrists who visit the centers several days a week. From there, individuals can be directed toward the programs they need. "You get out what you put in," he said.

New programs in Alameda County, according to Yglecias, include help for people to obtain benefits and help for inmates coming into the community under the provisions of Assembly Bill 109, which meets the Supreme Court's requirement to reduce prison populations in California. BACS is also opening new programs in Solano County for case management and jail avoidance.

Contact BACS at <http://www.bayareacs.org>.

In-Home Support Services

IHSS is a county-administered program that pays homecare workers to provide personal care for a person with a disability, including administering medications to someone with severe mental illness, and to do household tasks such as shopping, cooking, and cleaning so that the person can remain safely in his or her home. To be eligible, recipients need to be on Medi-Cal or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

For families with a mentally ill consumer, the program offers relief of personal care duties so that a parent or guardian can work outside the home. The IHSS program will provide a worker—which the family can select and approve—to match the family's needs. The program will also pay a family member \$11.50 per hour plus benefits to provide their own care instead of bringing in outside help.

"The program is designed to help people with mental health or physical disabilities stay in their

home and avoid having to live in a facility,” Zegarra said. IHSS also offers classes to train family members as care providers.

The registry process includes a home visit from a social worker to establish the types and hours of service needed, a form for your doctor to complete certifying the need, and a Notice of Action from the county to signify approval.

For more information, see <http://ac-pa4ihss.org> or call (510) 577-3552.

Center for Independent Living

CIL was started in 1972 near UC Berkeley to integrate people with disabilities into the community. It now provides support and resources so that people with physical or mental disabilities can live as independently as possible and not be dependent on nursing homes or family members.

“We operate on a peer level,” Earth said. “We are not case management, and we don’t tell you what you should do or push you to do anything you don’t want.” CIL’s core services are to offer information referral for people who are stuck because they don’t know their options. “We work along with people but not *for* people.”

The Bay Area is in an affordable housing crisis, she said. CIL can suggest places people look to find affordable housing that is also accessible, whether for people with mobility problems, or because they need service or emotional-support animals, or have chemical or other sensitivities. But she cautions that the search may take some time and that waiting lists are long.

Specialists at CIL can help individuals establish their independent living goals and the steps required to work toward them, such as gaining employment, acquiring a bank account, learning how to organize yourself or your finances, or perhaps learning how to navigate the public transit system. The center offers classes on many of these survival skills. The goal is deinstitutionalization and getting people back into the community.

Contact <http://www.cilberkeley.org>.

Al-Anon

As a member of Al-Anon for more than five years, “Sarah”—who did not use her last name for reasons of anonymity—described her own story. In living with an alcoholic, addict, or someone with se-

vere mental illness, she said, so much depends on your own attitude.

Many family members with an ill loved one try to be “fixers,” rescuers, taking care of everyone, and then harming themselves for the sake of the people they love. This can lead to codependency—a dysfunctional state where one actually supports the other person’s disability. “You’re part of the dance,” Sarah said. “You have to figure out where you are.”

Although designated for families of alcoholics, Al-Anon provides relief to many people in families dealing with severe mental illness.

Contact <https://www.ncwsa.org/d26/> for the Al-Anon Family Groups in the East Bay.

Mental Health Association

MHAAC has been serving people with mental illness and their families since 1958. It provides direct assistance to consumers and family members through programs like Prevention and Recovery in Early Psychosis (PREP), which assists young people experiencing their first psychotic break, and it runs the Family Education and Resource Center (FERC), which provides information, education, and support services to family members.

The agency also runs advocacy programs that:

- Support families and caregivers who have a relative being served at John George Psychiatric Pavilion or in the criminal justice system.
- Provide assistance to people with mental illness trying to secure benefits such as Medi-Cal, SSI, and General Assistance.
- Represent involuntarily held patients at capacity and certification review hearings.
- Respond to patients’ questions and complaints at psychiatric hospitals and facilities, including halfway houses and board-and-care homes.

MHAAC is also active in public educations and policy advocacy, such as the campaign to pass Proposition 63, the Mental Health Services Act.

Contact <http://mhaac.org>.

Past articles in the Speaker Notes series are available online at www.thomasthomas.com under “NAMI East Bay.” Also available is a copy of the brochure “Medications for Mental Illness.”

Musings from the President

Okay, I admit it—I'm an addict. I fought it for a long time but I have succumbed to it and now need to share in a public fashion. I am a Sudoku addict. I do the *San Francisco Chronicle* number puzzle every day, even when the print is small on Saturdays. I never cheat at Sudoku. If there is an obvious mistake, most times I just scribble over the whole puzzle and give up, since it's generally impossible to retrace the error. Sometimes I give up but, secretly, think that there was an error in the printing. It's my way of doing a cognitive check-in every morning: Sudoku and a strong cup of coffee is not the worst way to start a day. I can tell that some days I'm in a careless frame of mind and I make stupid mistakes. This way I intuitively know when I'm prone to doing or saying other careless things in the day. Other times I'm more rigorous and proceed more cautiously. Strategies need to change as the week proceeds. Monday puzzles are a piece of cake but they get progressively harder each day. And the Monday strategy doesn't work on Thursday, when there are fewer clues. That's when I need to have a definite plan of attack and a new problem-solving strategy.

So it is with life—perhaps even more so with our NAMI families. In support groups and classes and phone calls, I connect with folks at all stages. In the beginning of the challenge of dealing with mental illness in the family, we're absolutely terrifyingly desperate, as are our relative's behaviors. What's going on? What does it mean? What should I do? We look for missing pieces and try to fit them into our lives ... and sometimes that works. We'll try everything: indulge, do tough love, leave alone, monitor continuously. What's the answer? We try every strategy. What's the future? Permeating all of our problem-solving strategies are the feelings of confusion, grief, anger, fear, love ... exhaustion. There are new places: the psych emergency hospital, perhaps a treatment site, or a board and care. And new people in our life: the psychiatrist, maybe a social worker, and, ultimately, the new person who has taken the place of our loved one. Who is this? Where is the son or daughter or spouse of sibling I've known and loved for so many years?

As we become more familiar with what we're up against, oftentimes we can step back a bit and think

through strategies and plans of attack. The vast repertoire of things to do and ways to act has shrunk. We think, a la Dr. Phil, about how things have worked or not. We talk to others, listen and learn, and try things. Throughout, we need to be aware of our personal styles and our own instincts. We all have different tolerance levels: a certain level of disarray may be intolerable to one mom but within a comfort zone for another, and this is true as well for personal space boundaries, topics of discussion, etc. Hopefully, our emotional responsivity doesn't inform our behavior as significantly as it does in the beginning, and we can start trying to solve the puzzle from a more reasoned and logical base.

Point being: life changes, strategies change, we change. As we become more informed and familiar with our new challenges, our problem-solving strategies adjust. It doesn't follow a neat and tidy Monday-to-Saturday progression, as with Sudoku in a daily newspaper. But if you look back on your personal history in dealing with your relative, you can acknowledge and appreciate who you are in your growth and personal adaptation.

—Liz Rebensdorf, President, NAMI East Bay

Innovations Round 3 – LGBTQI2S

Alameda County's Behavioral Health Care Services (ACBHCS) Round 3 learning conference focused on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, and Two-Spirit (LGBTQI2S) community will be held on Thursday, March 24, at the UC Clark Kerr Campus at 2601 Warring Street, Berkeley, 8-4:30. The focus will be the content of the grantees' innovative 18-month projects focused on Five Learning Questions addressing special issues of the target populations. The conference will include grantee videos, exhibits about grantees' innovative projects, workshops, keynote speech, performances, continental breakfast, lunch, and a raffle. The conference is free but registration is required. Go to acinnovations.herokuapp.com/thirdRound_2014.

UC Study on Schizophrenia

Researchers at UC Berkeley are looking at ways to better recognize schizophrenia symptoms so that re-

lief-providing treatments can improve. The Schizophrenia Feeling and Thinking Study is open to individuals between 18 and 65, with a diagnosis of schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder, English fluent, and no neurological disease, head injury, depression, or substance abuse. Visit will involve an interview, film viewing and rating, questionnaires, and reading test. This will take three to four hours and is reimbursed at \$15/hour. Contact: 510-643-4098, esilabstudy@gmail.com.

In Pursuit of Joy

A workshop series on mental wellness designed for African-Americans is being offered in Hayward on four Saturday mornings in March. Topics covered are Stress, Depression, Grief and Loss, and Communication. Check the website of the JL Davis Family Resource Center, jldavisfrc.weebly.com.

Housing Issues

Two groups are now focusing energies around housing issues which impact our loved ones in the community. We invite those of you are interested to let us know so we can alert you to upcoming meetings and projects:

1. **Supportive Housing Collaborative (SHC)** is a mix of family members, providers, housing administrators, and people interested in development. Interest has been determined to lie with projects with options for both rental and ownership, number of units to fall under 40, population to be mixed, with a continuum of care orientation. A small study committee will be meeting with experts in the field around current projects, funding issues, advisability of having non-profit status, etc. The role of SHC may ultimately be as much advocacy as anything else. Next meeting TBA.
2. **Community Living Facility Networking** is chaired by Robert Ratner, Housing Services Director. Interest is in facilities which are shared living arrangements such as licensed board and cares, single room occupancy or residential hotels, room and board houses, halfway houses, and recovery residences. Goals are to develop and maintain a resource list, identify issues related to exist-

ing facilities and developing action plans to address such issues, promote quality standards, and support the work of quality operators. To join the email list, contact Housing Services Office at 510-891-8928 or everyonehome@acbhcs.org. Meetings are quarterly, and the next one is May 12.

Showers for the Homeless

The Diverse Housing Working Group (DHWG) in Albany is the main organizing group for a community-supported pilot program of free showers at the Albany Aquatic Center for people experiencing homelessness. Along with community partners, the pilot is the first step in the creation of a housing-services-related drop-in center. Volunteers are needed for three-hour shifts on Thursday afternoons. Contact Transitionalbany@yahoogroups.com for more information.

Scientists Move Closer to Understanding Schizophrenia's Cause

Scientists at Harvard University, Boston Children's Hospital, and the Broad Institute studied the genes of 64,785 people around the world and discovered a link between people with schizophrenia and mutations in a gene that, in its normal form, helps the immune system target infections.

In its mutated form, the gene makes proteins that aggressively tag an excess number of brain synapses for destruction during the normal process of shedding weak or redundant connections as the brain matures. This abnormal pruning takes place in the prefrontal cortex, the brain center which is concerned with thinking and planning.

This study helps explain the onset of schizophrenia in late adolescence as well as the associated losses in mental functioning. However, many other factors are also at work in establishing a person's risk of developing the disease.

For details of the study, see the *New York Times* article:

www.nytimes.com/2016/01/28/health/schizophrenia-cause-synaptic-pruning-brain-psychiatry.html.



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Please check your mailing label. If the code "16" is over your name on the right side of the label, your dues are current through 2016. If your mailing label indicates a previous year, or nothing at all, your dues are not current.

We urge you to mail your 2016 dues now. And if you can afford to add a bit more, please do so. Your \$35 NAMI East Bay membership gives you our newsletter six times a year, the quarterly "Connection" from NAMI-California, and the NAMI-National "Advocate." NAMI East Bay is nonprofit [501(c)3] and your dues and contributions are tax deductible.

Family Membership, \$35 per year Open Door Membership, \$3 per year

Make checks payable to "NAMI EAST BAY" and mail to NAMI East Bay, 980 Stannage Avenue, Albany, California 94706

Contact me for Family to Family Education Class

Name: _____ Phone No.: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

I'd like to volunteer: In the Office Grant Writing Membership Committee
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