

Out of psychosis comes hope

WALK BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER FOR MENTAL HEALTH

STORY AND PHOTOS BY LAURA CANIDA
STAFF WRITER

Walking among more than 5,000 people along the Vera Katz Eastbank Esplanade, I looked around and saw sadness, sickness and grief. But I also saw hope.

I am one of thousands who participated in the NAMIWalks in downtown Portland on May 19 to support the National Alliance on Mental Illness, or NAMI.

I saw hope that one day there will be a cure, or at least an easier life for people affected by mental health conditions.

For me, I walked for my son and countless other people I have met who've had their lives turned upside down because of a mental health diagnosis. I walked for those that haven't been diagnosed yet, whose lives haven't been changed forever.

My life changed on Sept 15, 2013, when my husband and I came home from vacation. We drove into our driveway and knew right away something was wrong.

My 21-year-old son, who was a Clackamas Community College student, was standing with a cardboard sign near our house hanging from his neck that said, "Will work for food."

At that moment, I had no idea how

much my life would change. I didn't know if he was on drugs or exactly what was going on.

I called our local hospital and they recommended bringing him in. When I couldn't get him to go with me, the hospital sent a team of counselors from Crisis Intervention Team to our house. My son was hallucinating and hearing voices – he thought someone was following him while we were gone.

This was my first experience with the Crisis Intervention Team of Clackamas County. After a while, they convinced him that it was okay to go to the doctor and get checked out.

After days in the emergency room, we were told he has schizophrenia. My head was swirling with thoughts, I was overwhelmed.

A nurse asked me if I had ever heard of NAMI. Why would I? I've never had to deal with mental health issues like this before.

Then I wondered, why hadn't I heard about it? You walk down the streets and you see people experiencing mental health symptoms all the time.

Now, six years later, I know all about NAMI, and I'm collaborating with CCC counselor Casey Sims on reestablishing

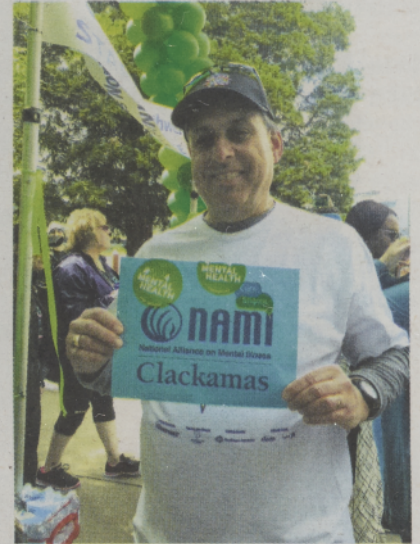
a chapter of NAMI on campus, here in Oregon City.

Counselor Ignacio Gonzales-Reyes said "NAMI is an excellent resource. They have been on campus before and I admire their commitment and dedication to advocacy for mental health services. The flow of students who need therapeutic services related to mental health needs varies greatly from term to term."

While NAMI on Campus wasn't available at the time my son was here, counselors were, but he didn't know how to reach out. NAMI on Campus provides education, advocacy, support and resources that students need.

I found out about NAMI early on in the process, and since then, NAMI has been a part of our everyday life. The Family to Family class NAMI offers helped us as family deal with my son's diagnosis and how to move forward step by step, day by day.

NAMI gets their funding from a few different sources, and one of those is from the yearly event, the NAMIWalks, that I participated in. The walk helps increase awareness, raise funds and hopefully cure the stigma of mental health conditions.



National Alliance of Mental Illness board member Eric Blumenthal leads the NAMI boardwalk team on May 19.

If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health symptoms, please reach out to a NAMI near you.

It can help you, like me, see hope. NAMI Clackamas is located at 10202 SE 32nd Ave, Suite 501 in Milwaukie 503-344-5050 or visit their website at namicc.org.



Mental health awareness advocate and former co-owner of Dave's Killer Bread, Dave Dahl, left, and Portland City Commissioner Amanda Fritz, right, kick off the NAMI walk event.



More than 5,000 attendees participated in the 5k walk along the Vera Katz Eastbank Esplanade.