

NAMI Greater Corpus Christi and NAMI Texas: REACHING an Underserved Population

By Laura Greenstein

With stigma running high, access to care running low and no NAMI affiliate within hundreds of miles, the population of Corpus Christi, Texas, was very underserved. After moving to the area, Jim and Diane Hall noticed how in need of mental health support their new hometown was, so they teamed up with NAMI Texas to create NAMI Greater Corpus Christi.

NAMI Texas offered the support of a consultant, Stacy Hollingsworth, to help them through the startup and Standards of Excellence processes. “We don’t just say, ‘Here’s the process.’ We also say, ‘And here’s a consultant who can help you through this process,’” explains Holly Doggett, executive director of NAMI Texas. “I don’t want someone out there beating their head against the wall trying to figure this out when we have a fabulous resource who knows this process forwards and backwards.”

By March 2017—only a little over a year after applying for affiliation—NAMI Greater Corpus Christi passed the national-level approval vote for Standards of Excellence. “I was really pleased to see not only how efficiently we were able to get NAMI Greater Corpus Christi through the Standards of Excellence process, but also just how enthusiastic everyone was in being partners in that process,” says Hollingsworth.

This accomplishment shows the value of having strong relationships between state organizations and local affiliates. As Doggett points out, offering this kind of joint support “helps local affiliates really concentrate on what they want to do, which is provide NAMI signature programming in their community.”

Spreading the Word

“For many years, Texas has ranked way down at the bottom in mental health services and funding. We’re ranked 48 or 49 out of all the states,” says Diane Hall. The mental health providers in the area are overtaxed, and there aren’t enough psychiatric beds for those who need them. And as far as support for family members, according to Jim Hall, “It was non-existent when we arrived. Even for people in recovery, there was nothing. Our affiliate provides two very vital areas of help” to a very large portion of the state. NAMI Greater Corpus Christi covers 10 counties and over 10,000 square miles—10 times the size of New Hampshire.



Staff and volunteers from NAMI Greater Corpus Christi and NAMI Texas attend the 2017 NAMI National Convention.

Since the affiliate serves such a large area, it can be difficult to reach everyone. So volunteers of NAMI Greater Corpus Christi, including leadership from Andrew and Angela Horner, do whatever they can to get the word out. From taking part in health fairs to promoting on the local news, this affiliate makes a strong effort to reach out to those in need. Some volunteers even go to behavioral hospitals to provide informational packets so that patients leaving the hospital know that NAMI can play a role in their recovery.

“We try to be everywhere mental health services are offered,” says Jim Hall. “Getting the word out is our most important activity after offering classes and support groups.”

Due to the amazing work of the NAMI Greater Corpus Christi leadership and help from NAMI Texas, this affiliate has grown tremendously in a short amount of time, even winning an award for its incredible growth. Within a year of applying to become an affiliate, it grew by 500 percent—from five people to 55. With this kind of momentum, passion and teamwork, they will likely continue to grow and serve their once-underserved population. ☺

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