

LIAISON REPORT

AGENCY: NAMI of Central Iowa (NAMI CI)

LIAISONS: Ashley Thompson and Kaitlyn Roling

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1. Need for Program. Describe who the target population is and whether their numbers are increasing or decreasing. Indicate the source of this information. Also, indicate how the program/service is different and how it is similar to others and what would happen if the program/service ceased to exist. List the priorities established by ASSET Funders, which the programming addresses.

Public Education and Awareness

The Executive Director explained that, as a new leader of the organization, she spent time evaluating the organization's prior public education and awareness programming, including educational presentations and related programs. Her findings indicated that there were a number of presentations that were implemented using speakers outside of NAMI experienced low attendance and were not always supportive of the organization's need to focus on building awareness and conducting core education on mental health. Through the Executive Director's discussion with the various funders of the organization, it became clear that there was a community need for:

- **"NAMI 101" presentations** to educate individuals about the organization, as well as its program and service offerings;
- **"In Our Own Voice: Living with Mental Illness" presentations** offered by clients/consumers with lived experience that focus on changing attitudes, assumptions and stereotypes by describing the reality of living with mental illness; and
- **"Ending the Silence" presentations** focused on teaching the warning signs of mental health conditions and what steps to take if you or a loved one are showing symptoms of a mental health condition.

The NAMI CI board, leadership and staff focused their efforts on these core evidence-based in-person programs and established partnerships with community groups and health care-focused educational programs (such as the Iowa State University and Ellsworth Community College nursing programs) to offer these educational opportunities to students. Additionally, NAMI CI was able to recruit new volunteers to be trained and certified in offering the presentations and received additional assistance from the organization's interns. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic hit the state and country in early 2020 and the need for offering programs virtually, NAMI (national) mandated that all local and state NAMI chapters "hold" on offering these types of programs because these evidence-based programs had not been offered (at that time) virtually. Because of this pause, NAMI CI paused all educational programs for two months which will impact their overall attendance and impact numbers for the current year; however, NAMI CI leadership indicated that their refocus on core programming has help achieved larger attendance and engagement than the prior year.

NAMI (national) and NAMI Iowa granted NAMI CI the ability to begin teaching the "Sharing Your Story" program with law enforcement. The program is focused on Individuals with mental illness or their family members sharing their stories specific to prior interactions with law enforcement, with the goal of improving relationships.

NAMI on Campus

NAMI on Campus, a student organization on Iowa State's campus, was started in 2016. In typical years, they have monthly meetings and are recognized as a club. They are also connected to other NAMI campus groups to share ideas and network. The purpose of the organization is to address mental health issues on ISU's campus through the following:

- Raising mental health awareness
- Educating the campus community
- Promoting services and support
- Advocating for mental health issues

It is important to note that NAMI on Campus has been experiencing issues due to the complexities of navigating operating on campus during the COVID-19 pandemic. As many classes have moved online, the current leadership of NAMI on Campus decided to remain at home for the semester. As the organization has tried to navigate implementing fulltime leadership, they have realized that proper training was not completed by the president and treasurer that is required by the university to retain the organization's recognized status. During our discussion with the Executive Director, the organization was still facing this problem and trying to change leadership for the spring semester. In addition, many of the typical events hosted by NAMI on Campus were not held due to restrictions of gatherings by the university during the pandemic.

Wellness Center

The NAMI CI Wellness Center ("drop-in center") offers direct support and programs, such as art, music, exercise and writing classes. The center has increased its hours and is now open Monday through Friday from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. It is primarily staffed by one peer support specialist who is working on her certification. Last year, they served 116 unduplicated clients and are averaging 119 visits per month. NAMI CI continues to receive feedback that clients love the new center space.

The intensive psychiatric rehab program, offered in partnership with CFR, is held on Mondays and Wednesdays. This has been a positive partnership as it offers a program that serves a population that is in recovery and may not otherwise attend the center for other direct support and program offerings. Additionally, it has afforded NAMI CI the opportunity to recruit program participants to become part of advocacy activities and the Peer-to-Peer program, of which the organization experienced its highest number of participants this year.

Following temporary closure (mid-March through May) due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the center is back to normal operations with social distancing, separate client workspaces, sanitizer available throughout, temperature checks upon entry and additional safety protocols in place.

For those clients who are uncomfortable or unable to attend the center, NAMI CI is making phone calls, bringing items to them at their homes and sending notes. There were some transportation challenges for a small number of clients but that has since been resolved.

NAMI CI is exploring "creative marketing campaigns" to help increase awareness and use of the center. It was shared that other NAMI CI centers in Boone, Iowa Falls and Marshalltown have greater numbers in terms of unduplicated clients and visits, so the organization is continuing to evaluate opportunities to increase participation at the Ames center. In comparing the centers, those not located in Ames have additional space that allows for pool and ping-pong tables; offer showers and laundry facilities; and advertise food/meal offerings (not currently allowed in the City of Ames) which may be contributing factors.

Family and Consumer Education & Support

As previously indicated, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, NAMI (national) mandated that all local and state NAMI chapters "hold" on offering these types of programs because these evidence-based programs had not been tested to be offered virtually. Following a two month pause, NAMI CI was able to restart the programs. Both programs experienced high graduation rates, with the most recent Family-to-Family program graduating five of the original six families who enrolled and the Peer-to-Peer program graduating 13 of the 16 individuals who enrolled. The next round of programs were to be kicked off this fall; however, the family who leads the programs reside and in Marshalltown and were hit by the recent derecho storm and have asked to hold on a new cycle until January 2021.

NAMI CI was granted initial funding from NAMI (national) to implement the Family & Friends program, a 90 minute to four-hour program (with the length of the program depending on the level of detail needed for specific groups).

NAMI CI support groups have doubled from two to four times per week and meet virtually. Family groups have increased as well, from once per month to once per week during the pandemic.

Funder Priorities:

City of Ames

#1 Meet basic needs, with emphasis on low to moderate income

#2 Meet mental health and chemical dependency needs

Iowa State University Student Government

4. Programs that empower traditionally discriminated-against peoples

United Way of Story County

HEALTH

Result 1: Enough food / healthy food

Strategy 1.1: Reduce the meal gap

Result 2: Youth & adults are emotionally, behaviorally and socially well

Strategy 2.1 Increase awareness of mental health and available prevention and treatment services

Strategy 2.3: Increase opportunities for underserved populations to reduce social isolation, increase positive, healthy social interactions and experiences, and receive social-emotional support

EDUCATION

Result 3: Learners develop the skills needed for life and career

Strategy 3.1: Ensure leaders are engaged

Strategy 3.2: Ensure families and/or support systems are engaged

Strategy 3.3: Decrease barriers to participation and success

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Result 1: Access to basic needs

Strategy 1.2: Provide emergency services

Strategy 1.3: Ensure access to reliable transportation

Strategy 1.4: Grow knowledge of community resources to help meet basic needs

2. Program Strengths. *Pick two to four factors that contribute most importantly to the program/service outcomes. Do not list everything that is satisfactory. We will assume that things not mentioned are okay. For each strength describe some supporting evidence.*

The NAMI CI leadership, staff and board members have mental health lived experience – either as an individual with a mental health condition, or a family member of friend supporting someone living with a mental health condition. This lived experience “helps to eliminate walls and guardedness” with NAMI CI clients/consumers and offers a unique perspective from other organizations in how NAMI CI educates and communicates to the communities they serve.

While the NAMI CI has experienced a significant transition of governance and leadership over the past eighteen months, the organization’s leadership and executive board members indicated these changes to be positive overall. Specifically, the change in geographic and professional diversity of board members now includes greater representation from the counties and communities served, as well as former Mental Health and Disability Services (MHDS) regional leadership and mental health provider representatives. These changes indicate greater inclusion of key stakeholders, community leaders and those with lived experience in leadership and governance that will undoubtedly contribute to short- and long-term success of NAMI CI.

3. Program Weaknesses. *Select factors that detract most from the program/service achieving its outcomes. Present details as described above. Recommendations for reducing these weaknesses should follow the discussion of each weakness.*

As mentioned in previous liaison reports, limited staff and programmatic support continues to present a challenge for the organization. While NAMI CI had been successful in recruiting volunteers and interns to assist with programs and offerings, the pandemic has hindered this effort throughout much of 2020. The NAMI CI leadership and board have been developing a long-term staffing plan that would include the addition of a program coordinator, as well as increasing the organization's current office assistant position to a full-time role; however, they acknowledged that this will require an increase in donors.

The organization acknowledged challenges with technology, including an inability to provide computers or laptops for interns who must rely on personal equipment to complete their work. The organization is looking to increase the awareness of its services in Ames and are in communication with the city to determine how to advertise their services. They are looking to expand awareness of the organization through social media and advertisements.

4. Financial Outlook. *Current funding concerns should be described. In addition, the assessment of the program's plan to cope with shrinking resources should be given.*

ASSET funding is vital to NAMI Central Iowa. The Executive Director discussed that they do not receive funding from the state or national levels of their organizations for their affiliate programs. NAMI applies for additional grants and outside funding, but this is limited. Additional grants and outside funding has become more restricted with the COVID-19 pandemic. They receive donations from the public, but these are often unpredictable.

5. Internal Management Practices. *Summarize your assessment of the management of the agency, and the role of the Board. If there are deficiencies, details should be provided. Conclude with recommendations when appropriate.*

The NAMI board meets regularly and is highly engaged and active. Every two years, the Board designs a strategic plan for their organization. They have experienced a transitional period within the past eighteen months, but this transition has been a positive for the organization.

6. Agency Suggestions/Comments. *Make note of any suggestions, comments or questions agencies may have with regard to the ASSET process, budget forms and or anything else that relates to the process.*

This ASSET cycle will serve as the first full cycle for the NAMI CI Executive Director, staff and numerous board members who are all new to the organization. The Executive Director and board treasurer expressed their appreciation to their ASSET liaisons for the additional support and trainings offered to complete the reporting and budgetary items necessary for ASSET funding. All parties acknowledged the complexities of the ASSET progress and the liaisons ensured that NAMI CI was made aware the ASSET Administrative Team will continue to offer support as additional questions or needs arise.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT:

The NAMI CI leadership and board of directors have undergone governance and programmatic changes over the past eighteen months. While these changes led to short-term changes in the general stability of the organization, a renewed focus on core programming and services, and greater diversity and cross-community representation on the board of directors has positioned NAMI CI for financial and operational success.

The NAMI CI leadership and the board are appreciative of and focused on effective and efficient use of funding and resources entrusted to them by ASSET. Further, leadership and the board are passionate about the organization and its mission, vision and values.

NAMI CI has taken appropriate steps to evaluate its prior programs and offerings and incorporate feedback from the communities it serves to refocus efforts on needed, core evidence-based programs and services.