



NAMI SA YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

By Tara Turek

NAMI Southern Arizona (NAMI SA), the local affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is a non-profit organization providing no-cost advocacy, education, and support to those affected by mental illness.

In 1983, a small group of like-minded community members gathered at the dining table of Si and Ellie Schorr. This small group formed Alliance for Mentally Ill of Southern Arizona (AMISA). They worked tirelessly to advocate at the local, regional, and state levels to prevent funding cuts for behavioral health services. Si and Ellie's home served as headquarters for several years until moving into their first office at the Historic YWCA in 1988, where a family resource center was established.

Through hard work, dedication, and diligence, AMISA focused the public's attention on the issues affecting behavioral health. Thus, AMISA became the voice for those with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) and their families. AMISA worked closely with the Coalition of Mental Health Boards of Pima County to avoid funding cuts, and worked to keep legislature from eliminating the insanity defense.

Becoming one of the first NAMI affiliates in the country, AMISA took on the name of the national organization, thereby becoming NAMI Southern Arizona in the 90's. Education and support groups were started and advocacy efforts continued in areas such as non-discrimination against the disabled in group homes, securing funding for those with SMI, initiating a class action lawsuit to provide services for emotionally disturbed children, and serving as a local member of the National Institute of Mental Health investigatory team.

The turn of the century saw NAMI SA move from the Historic YWCA to Broadway and Swan, where education, support, and advocacy efforts continued until 2005, at which point NAMI SA moved to its current location on 22nd St. From the new location, NAMI SA executed In Our Own Voice, and other initiatives. Moreover, NAMI SA worked with the Crisis Intervention Network to identify officers who could be dispatched to mental health calls, and organized to support Bond Issue elections that promoted a Psychiatric Urgent Care Facility and Psychiatric Unit. Finally, NAMI SA began holding an annual awareness event and fundraiser called NAMIWalks. 2023 represents the 18th year hosting the event.

In 2023, NAMI SA celebrated its 40th anniversary. Guests included executives from behavioral health organizations, business leaders in the community, and political representatives. NAMI SA received a Proclamation from the Mayor of Tucson, a Commendation from the Governor of Arizona, and a Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition from the office of Congressman Juan Ciscomani.

2023 also welcomed NAMI SAs new Executive Director, Briana Felix. Briana officially took over operations in October, and brings with her an extensive knowledge of non-profits and fundraising.

As NAMI SA staff looks to the future, several staff and board members will be taking the NAMI Smarts for Advocacy class through the national office to continue advocacy efforts. Furthermore, they are expanding resources, the Ending the Silence program, and working toward their vision of a new building where they can provide even more vital resources to those in need.

On April 6, 2024, NAMI SA will hold its 19th annual NAMIWalks at Kennedy Park in the Fiesta Area. Their goal is to raise \$150,000. If you're interested in sponsorship opportunities or starting a team, please call the office at 520.622.5582.

REGISTER NOW



namiWalks

Southern Arizona

Saturday, April 6, 2024, 9:00AM
Kennedy Park Fiesta Area - Tucson, AZ
namiwalks.org/southernarizona

