



National Alliance on Mental Illness

**nami**

**Memphis**

**December 2023**

**NAMI Memphis NEWSLETTER**

### **Congratulations Dr. Eula Whittaker**

Dr. Eula-Lee Whittaker, former NAMI Memphis Board Member, was nominated as one of the 2023's Women Who Lead in Mental Health by the Memphis Business Journal. Dr. Whittaker is CEO of ABC's For Life, and Lead Family Coordinator, UTHSC Center for Youth Advocacy and Well Being. Dr. Whittaker is a mental health advocate in the truest sense of the word and has dedicated her life to helping families and individuals struggling with mental illness.

Dr. Whittaker has volunteered with NAMI Memphis for several years as a former board member and as a family support group facilitator and teacher, including continuing our only support group during COVID.

We wish to congratulate Dr. Whittaker for this much deserved award, and to thank her for all that she has done to help NAMI Memphis with our mission. She has truly been a blessing to so many people.



## Letter from NAMI Memphis President



I am deeply honored and grateful to stand as the newly appointed NAMI Memphis Board of Directors President. Your trust and support mean the world to me, and I want to express my heartfelt appreciation.

To the members of NAMI Memphis, your dedication to our cause and your tireless efforts in advocating for mental health awareness are truly commendable. It is your commitment that has made NAMI Memphis the remarkable force it is today. I am humble and excited to lead this exceptional group of individuals.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the ongoing board members for their hard work and dedication. Your leadership has been invaluable in shaping the future of NAMI Memphis, and I am committed to building upon the strong foundation you have laid.

As we move forward, my goal is to continue our mission of reducing stigma, promoting understanding, and providing support to those affected by mental illness. I am excited about the journey ahead and the positive impact we can create together.

In closing, I want to thank you all for choosing me as the NAMI Memphis Board President. It is a responsibility I do not take lightly, and I am committed to working tirelessly for the betterment of our organization and the community we serve. Your support is the wind beneath our wings, and I look forward to this journey with great enthusiasm.

Thank you for your trust, and I am excited to embark on this new chapter with all of you.

Best Regards,

Marta B Hernandez

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT ...

By Sharon Gartrell



Hi NAMI Memphis Newsletter Readers. I'm Sharon M. Gartrell. I am a totally/permanently disabled US Army retiree. I have been a member of NAMI Memphis for nearly a quarter of a century. I have an extensive writing history. I look forward to writing and sharing bountiful and uplifting information, resources, personal experiences, and a little common sense. Please feel free to contact me with questions, comments, or suggestions to discuss and share. [sharonmgartrell@gmail.com](mailto:sharonmgartrell@gmail.com).

### My Letter to S---- Jun 12, 2023, 10:58 PM

Dear Big Boy,

I'm writing this letter hoping that it'll not only soften my heart towards you but help you understand how badly you've broken it. I'm so angry and resentful that I cringe each time you call me from jail.

You don't understand that your actions have caused us to become estranged. That means I don't want anything to do with you. But because of the situation you're in, and I know you need me, I'll always answer your calls.

This letter is meant to heal us both. Regardless of our mental limitations and multiple diagnoses. Regardless of the pain and confusion we've caused each other and our immediate family members. Regardless of the past and the present. We must trust God, mental health personnel, and each other if we have ANY chance of surviving this latest fiasco. On several occasions, I've hurt those I love. Sometimes I was mentally stable and sometimes I wasn't. But I knew right from wrong, and I still chose to hurt them. By God's grace, they eventually forgave me.

This is why we're estranged. You deliberately hurt me so deeply that it may take years for me to recover financially and emotionally, forgive, and trust you again. Your father blames us both but I'm not taking the blame. The only thing I'm guilty of is loving and trusting you too much!

I don't blame your disabilities. I blame you!

You are a young man now. A first-time Dad. I know Mama and I raised you but, I should have let you go a long time ago. If I'd done so sooner, I wouldn't be in the situation you left me in. I held you too tightly because your Mama wasn't there, and your Daddy was a single parent with two disabled children and couldn't raise you both alone.

I saw you suffering from your many diagnoses and symptoms. I'd never dream I'd be forced to love you from a distance. But I must protect my financial and mental health. Do you even remember what YOU'VE been through? What you've put US, your FAMILY, through?

Can you see now why I've favored you over my other grandchildren? The immediate Gartrell's lives have been difficult and dysfunctional for many years. Your behavior and consequences have made matters extremely worse.

Despite it all, you've struggled to become mature and grow into a loving, protective, and sometimes responsible family member. God has seen our generational mental health spiral downward. He's helped us through each situation. He's lifting me out of this financial hole you've buried me in. I'm humbly grateful for a slow recovery and I know you are remorseful.

God is softening my heart towards you, Honey. If not, I wouldn't be supporting you're your newborn baby or your girlfriend. Our family loves us despite ourselves. Our lifestyles are often chaotic, impulsive, and sometimes dangerous. But with the Lord, close friends, family members, proper medical treatments, and meds, our lives can be joyous.

I hope you understand this heart-to-heart letter. Please think about the importance of staying on your meds, finding, and staying on a job, no weed smoking, and staying out of trouble once you're released. Please remember and understand the pain I'm in. Respect my wishes and do not contact me unless it's necessary. I'll always love you even from a distance. Remember, no matter what or how long it takes, we all love and support you and want you home, as soon as possible...especially me!

Love Grandma

This is one of two personal letters published and distributed in November 2023, in a book entitled, Hope For Troubled Minds-Tributes To Those With Brain Illnesses And Their Loved Ones. Tony Roberts and contributors (including me and my only grandson) comprised this book of despair, love, hope, and faith for families struggling with severe mental health disorders. One hundred percent of the proceeds from the sale of these books will be evenly distributed between NAMI, The Treatment Advocacy Center (TAC), and Delight in Disorder Ministries (DiDMin). Please help spread the joy of these personal letters, poems, and brief essays by purchasing a book through Delight In Disorder Ministries, [www.DELIGHTINDISORDER.ORG](http://www.DELIGHTINDISORDER.ORG)

## GRIEVING DURING THE HOLIDAYS

Grieving the loss of a loved one is a deep and difficult challenge at any time. But the holiday season can magnify your sense of loss and mourning. Family gatherings and seasonal events can be painful reminders of the absence of a loved one. At the same time, they can also be comforting rituals where you spend time with family and friends, focusing on good memories and trying to recapture your sense of joy. If you are mourning a loss of a loved one this year, here are some important things to keep in mind.

Family gatherings can be painful reminders of the absence of a loved one. Sometimes the loss can be recent, sometimes not. Anniversaries of losses are often difficult. Sometimes this can be magnified when the loss of a loved one was during a holiday.

**1. Only do what feels right.** It's up to you to decide which activities, traditions or events you can handle. Don't feel obligated to participate in anything that doesn't feel doable. Grieving takes time. You are very vulnerable right now, so all you need to do is get through the day or week or season — in a healthy way. Try not to think much beyond that.

**2. Accept your feelings — whatever they might be.** Everyone takes his or her own path in grief and mourning. Some may try to avoid sad feelings; others will be bathed in tears. Some feel bad that they aren't up for enjoying a holiday; others feel guilt because they are feeling joy. However you feel, accept it. And accept the inevitable ups and downs: You may feel peaceful one moment and gut-wrenchingly sad the next. Try to stay in tune with your own highest truth and you will know how to get through the holiday without judging yourself or others.

**3. Call on your family and friends.** Talk with loved ones about your emotions. Be honest about how you'd like to do things this year — if you want to talk about those who have passed, then do so, and let others know it's OK. Take a buddy to events for support and create an "escape plan" together in case you need to bow out quickly. Read books about getting through the holidays after loss, and seek out support groups, lectures or faith-community events. Seek professional support from a therapist. Stay in touch with others who are grieving via online groups and connections with friends.



## When Helping Hurts: Trauma's Effects on First Responders

Fred is a 40-year-old firefighter who has been working as a first responder for more than 15 years. In his first year as a firefighter, he arrived at a car accident in which three children were killed. Since then, he has been among the first to respond to the scenes of countless injuries and dozens of deaths.

Although he tries not to think about the fatalities, he remembers each one. When asked how he and his colleagues cope with the trauma of witnessing such horrific events, he looks away, chuckles, and says, shaking his head, "We joke around and pretend it doesn't bother us. You don't want to be the one going to counseling. Everyone would call you a wimp."

First responders such as firefighters, EMTs, and police officers face horrors in their work that most of us can't imagine. In helping everyday people in the worst of times, they witness death, destruction, and much of the worst of what humans can do to hurt one another. An article from *The Police Chief* discusses the importance of seeking professional help for law enforcement officers. EMTs, paramedics, Physicians, physician's assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses, and other medical professionals are also typically exposed to more human suffering than anyone should have to see. An article in *Counseling Today*, aptly titled "First to Respond, Last to Seek Help," lists the effects of traumatic experiences on first responders and the many barriers to seeking help these individuals face.

Christine, 35, has been a hospital nurse in a children's cancer unit for 10 years. While she can tell joyful stories of the children whose treatment succeeds in overcoming the cancer cells, there are many stories she doesn't share. While she doesn't speak about the pain and suffering she has seen, these memories haunt her at night when she tries to sleep. She is beginning to question her faith as she struggles to understand why children and their families have to experience such pain. Most days she cries in her car on the way to work, but she can't stand the thought of leaving her job.

Her supervisor has suggested she go to counseling and she views this recommendation as an insult to her professional skills.

Part of the problem is the environment in which firefighters, EMTs, police, and medical personnel do their heroic work. The fast-paced nature of their work settings limits opportunity for expressing feelings about what they see. Maintaining a clinical distance between patients and themselves helps first responders and medical professionals maintain their composure in the worst situations.

But there is a reason those are helpers seek out helping work. These are caring people by nature, and it hurts to see others in pain. While most employers offer counseling through employee assistance programs, first responders and health care providers often feel, as Fred mentioned, that asking for help is a sign of weakness.

Exposure to trauma is an occupational hazard for first responders and medical professionals, and as such, it is necessary to practice self-care and know the signs that trauma is taking a toll. According to the Trauma Center of the Justice Resource Institute, the effects of exposure to trauma are cumulative. The longer one has worked as a first responder, the more likely he or she is to have a reaction to trauma.

## WHEN TO CONSIDER SEEKING PROFESSIONAL HELP

According to the Trauma Center at the Justice Resource Institute, a first responder who is experiencing the following symptoms should seek professional help to assess and treat the effects of their traumatic experiences:

- **Hyper-arousal:** anxiety, trouble sleeping, fear, irritability, or anger, as well as other physiological symptoms of arousal of the parasympathetic nervous system.
- **Avoidance:** avoiding reminders of the traumatic event, including people who witnessed it, the place where the event occurred, thinking or talking about the experience, and/or avoiding other people—withdrawing from others and isolating oneself.
- **Intrusions:** nightmares, flashbacks, or other intrusive thoughts or memories of the event.
- **Psychic numbing:** using substances to avoid feelings, feeling numb, spacing out, or feeling as if things are unreal.

If trauma symptoms are interfering with your enjoyment of things you used to love, if you're starting to hate your job and question why you went into the field, or if the way you look at the world has changed, counseling can help. Asking for help is a sign of strength.

### **Suicide Crisis Hotline 988**

**You may also text in Tennessee to 741741**

**You may find additional confidential helplines and support for first responders by visiting [Nami.org](https://www.nami.org)**

## **ONGOING SUPPORT GROUPS**

Family support Group  
On Zoom  
1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesdays of the month at 6:45 pm:  
Facilitators: Eula & Brigid

Family Support Group  
In Person  
St. Francis of Assisi  
2100 Germantown Pkwy  
Room 111  
Cordova, TN 38016  
NO MEETING IN DECEMBER  
Meetings resume January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
6:30 – 8:00 PM  
Facilitators: Susan & Jeff

BRIDGES Support Group & With Hope In Mind Support Group  
In Person  
Trafalgar Baptist Church  
6161 Summer Ave.  
Memphis, TN 38134  
2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month  
6:30 – 8:00 PM  
Facilitators: Fulya & Becky

S.O.S Support Group  
Schizophrenia/Schizoaffective Disorder Support Group  
Google Meets  
2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays of the month  
6:00 – 7:30 PM  
Facilitator: John

## DECEMBER 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3	4	5 Family Support Group On Zoom 6:45 – 8:00 pm	6	7 First Day of Hanukkah  St. Francis od Asissi Family Support group In Cordova resumes in January 2024	8	9
10	11	12 BRIDGES Support & Family Support Group Trafalgar Baptist Church 6161 Summer Ave. Memphis, TN 38134	13	14 SOS Support Group Google Meets 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM	15	16
17	18	19 Family Support Group On Zoom 6:45 – 8:00 pm	20	21	22	23
24	25 Christmas Day	26	27	28 SOS Support Group Google Meets 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM	29	30
31 New Year's Eve						