

NAMI Ohio Annual Meeting & Awards Presentation

COLUMBUS, OHIO, UNITED STATES, April 22, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Chris Wierman opened the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio's annual conference and advocacy day with a deeply personal story of her son's recent encounter with the mental health system.

"In recent weeks, the mental health system has failed not only my son but our family," she said. "We knew that our son needed help. He often needed help but this time it was worse. As a member of the NAMI Ohio Board of Directors and someone who is knowledgeable about the mental health system, I thought we could get help. We did everything to our ability to get the system involved before there was a tragedy."

She recounted how her son's untreated mental illness caused him to drive through two counties, exceeding speeds of 100 mph, before he was arrested.

"I wish this was an isolated incident. But we know at NAMI Ohio and we believe everyone working in the mental health system understands, we are failing when delivering services to those suffering with severe and persistent mental illness."

Chris' story opened the door to a unique virtual meeting shining bright light on the critical need to refocus Ohio's mental health on individual care, or "person-centered care." The annual event usually attracts several hundred people to the Statehouse.

"Please prioritize mental health," NAMI Ohio Executive Director Terry Russell pleaded with a state legislative committee recently. "We need to develop a plan for what people need, not what is available. For too many years we have focused on the system, not the individual."

Russell stressed the urgent need for developing crisis centers and crisis services, more aid for group homes, supportive housing, improved treatment in emergency rooms, more rehabilitation centers for those released from state hospitals, medication for patients in jails, and prioritizing suicide prevention.

NAMI's virtual meeting including presentations from Gov. Mike DeWine; Lori Criss, director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services; Dan Gillison, CEO of NAMI National; Luke Russell, NAMI Ohio deputy director, and Tony Coder, director of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation.

The keynote speaker was Diana Chao, a 22-year-old first-generation Chinese-American immigrant, who founded a group called Letters to Strangers (L2S) when she was a sophomore in high school after bipolar disorder nearly ended her life. By beginning to heal through letters, she discovered that writing is humanity distilled into ink. Today, her organization impacts over 35,000 people on six continents and publishing the world's first youth-for-youth mental health guidebook for free.

NAMI Ohio honored individuals and organizations around the state with awards Thursday at its annual conference and legislative day.

The Herb Reisenfeld Award went to former state Sen. Bob Spada and his wife, Mary, of North Royalton. Bob, a former NAMI Ohio Board president and member of NAMI national, and his wife, are long-time advocates for mental health care.

Other awards:

Affiliate of the Year – NAMI Summit County.

Mental Health Board Mental Health Board of the Year – Mental Health & Recovery Services Board of Lucas County, Scott Sylak, executive director.

Legislator of the Year – State Sen. Theresa Gavarone of Bowling Green, who said helping people with mental illness has been “one of my drivers since day one” as a legislator.

Adult Care Facility Operator of the Year – Darryl Lumpkins, Cincinnati. He credited NAMI and state officials for helping his home weather the pandemic storm. “We were lucky to get this far by the grace of God,” Darryl said.

Mental Health Provider Agency of the Year - NetCare Access, Franklin County's mental health crisis center, serving 10,000 people annually.

Mental Health Champion of the Year – Margaret Sterling, of the Adam-Amanda Mental Health Rehabilitation Center, a step-down residential treatment facility in Athens. Margaret and some of her staff lived at the center 24 hours a day for more than two weeks during the pandemic to provide much-needed services.

Executive Director's Award – Ingrid Silvian, 91, of Franklin County, a long-time volunteer and original “NAMI Mommy,” who has been a fierce advocate for her mentally ill daughter since her first psychiatric hospitalization in 1982.

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