

NAMI, ASAP merger means expansion of services

By Lindsay Pykosz

Contributing Writer Representatives from the National Alliance on Mental Illness' (NAMI) Cape Cod and the Islands Nantucket chapter and the Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention (ASAP) have been working for over a year to merge the two organizations, whose missions go hand in hand.

"One of the reasons for this merger is bringing mental illness and mental health together with drug misuse, because the two traditionally, until very recently, have been dealt with as separate silos, but they're interrelated," said Jackie Lane, executive director of NAMI Cape Cod and the Islands.

Formed in July 1982 under the name AMICUS (Alliance for the Mentally Ill to Create Understanding and Support), NAMI Cape Cod and the Islands has evolved into a nonprofit, membership-based organization that provides, free of charge, educational and support programs for people with mental illness and their families.

ASAP, founded in 1995, fosters a safe and healthy island community through programs involving education, awareness, advocacy and prevention. Through this new partnership, ASAP has become a division of NAMI.

"The alliance itself is the group of people, not the legal details, and so the alliance remains," said Sue Mynttinen, director of substance misuse and addiction services for ASAP.

The new partnership has brought about a focus on expanding programming for all ages.

"We're developing programming that really emphasizes the relationship between mental-health issues in combination with alcohol and drug misuse," Lane said. Beginning this month, Janina Kean, a substance-use disorders expert and Yale-trained, board-certified psychiatric and mental-health nurse practitioner, will bring her "Community Awareness" program back to the island, but with a new focus.

"We've asked her to rework the Community Awareness program and build in more about mental health and mental-health disorders so that we can do that dual-diagnosis education," Mynttinen said. "While some substanceuse disorders are brought on by other external factors or internal factors, self-medicating during times of stress can be a very slippery slope for folks. So we wanted to make sure we could start, especially with the merge with NAMI, on broadening the topic."

The four-part series will feature a monthly standalone virtual workshop with Kean. The first, "Mental Health vs. Mental Illness," will be held Friday, Feb. 12 at 6 p.m. Additional dates include March 12, April 9 and May 7. As part of Mental Health Awareness Month in May, the February

session will be repeated May 21.

ASAP, NAMI and a handful of other island organizations, including Health Imperatives, the Nantucket Boys & Girls Club, the Nantucket Community School, EZIA Athletic Club and the Family Resource Center, have come together to create a group called ACK Teen, which provides programming for students in grades nine-12.

Programs range from fitness to cooking classes, and are funded through a grant from the Community Foundation for Nantucket's Nantucket Fund.

"For kids feeling isolated and just disengaged, we've tried to come together to put out a bunch of programs that reach different kinds of kids," Mynttinen said.

"We have the cooking class, a fitness pass to the EZIA Athletic Club and a mentoring program. And ASAP, along with NCTV, is putting out a media program where teens will learn to make a short film. We're really excited to have different options for teens."

The overall goal for both Lane and Mynttinen is to provide year-round programming for islanders. Lane said that they would like to provide prerecorded online programming in order to provide people with more opportunities for access. This is already being provided by NAMI on Cape Cod.

For more information about each organization, visit their websites at www.asapnantucket.org or www.namicapecod.org/NAMI-on-Nantucket

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