**Peer support** is getting help from someone who has been there. People with similar experiences may be able to listen, give hope and guidance toward recovery in a way that is different, and may be just as valuable, as professional services. Peer services include mutual support groups, peer-run programs and services in traditional mental health agencies provided by peer support specialists. While peer support groups may be composed entirely of people who have simply learned through their own experience, some types of peer providers undergo training and certification to qualify. In addition to direct services, many peer-run organizations advocate to improve opportunities for people recovering from mental illnesses.

A **peer support group** is a voluntary gathering of people with similar challenges, usually weekly or monthly for an hour or two, to share experiences and coping strategies and offer understanding. [**NAMI Connection**](http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=nami_connection) is one type of peer support group in which trained facilitators, who themselves have lived experience with mental illness, guide group members to listen and provide supportive, meaningful feedback to each other.

**Peer-run services**are mental health programs where the staff uses information, skills and resources they have gained in their recovery to help others. Peer services are based on principles of empowerment, choice, mutual help and recovery. The goal of peer-run programs is to create a supportive place in which people can find understanding peers, can learn recovery skills and can help others. Common types of peer-run programs include, but are not limited to:

* Drop-in or peer support center:for friendship, peer counseling, recovery learning and skill-building, wellness supports, community-based activities and connection to services. Often open in evenings and weekends as well as during the business day, peer support centers serve as a “home away from home.”
* Peer mentoring, peer case management: On a one-to-one basis, certified peer support specialists listen, help plan recovery and help identify supporters. Peer mentoring can occur at a center or in the community. Peer mentors not only teach coping skills, but also emphasize physical wellness through careful attention to sleep, good nutrition, stress management and social support.

**NAMI New York City Metro**

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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Phone:** | (212) 684-3365 | | **Email:** | [**helpline@naminyc.org**](mailto:helpline@naminyc.org) | | **Serving:** | Bronx, Brooklyn, Kings, Manhattan, New York, Queens, Richmond, Staten Island | |  | | | **Contacts** | | | **Name:** | Ms. Wendy Brennan | | **Position:** | Executive Director | | **Email:** | [**wbrennan@naminyc.org**](mailto:wbrennan@naminyc.org) | | **Phone:** | (212) 684-3365 | |