

http://www.omaha.com/livewellnebraska/health/new-uno-group-tells-students-struggling-with-mental-illness-you/article_86f68843-1956-5e93-b369-9863a1734d4e.html

New UNO group tells students struggling with mental illness: ‘You have support here’

By Kate Howard \ World-Herald staff writer Sep 1, 2015



MEGAN FARMER/THE WORLD HERALD

From left, NAMI advisor Cheryl Campbell, NAMI treasurer Amy Weaver and NAMI vice president Jennifer Alquicira hold signs during a student activity fair at UNO. "There are no limits to recovery," Campbell said. "Whatever you're working on, we can always improve on it daily."



Amy Weaver and Jennifer Alquicira struggle with depression, and they refuse to treat that like a secret.

Last week, the University of Nebraska at Omaha students stood in the Pep Bowl during a student activity fair, recruiting classmates with homemade signs: You are not alone. End stigma. Advocate.

They are founding members of a student organization, launched last year, aimed at destigmatizing mental illness and offering a place to find support during what can be a rough transition, even without the complication of mental illness.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness recently expanded to campus chapters, and UNO is home to Nebraska's first NAMI on Campus. Four people serve on the UNO chapter's board now, and their membership numbers are slowly growing with publicity.

“I have dealt with depression and anxiety. I work on it on my own, and with my family,” said Alquicira, a junior majoring in public health. “I want to tell people that have dealt with this that you have support here.”

The NAMI group is for students who have mental illness, but also for anyone who has a family member suffering or anyone interested in health careers.

The group’s activities are a combination of awareness events and support, said Cheryl Campbell, who works in the UNO counseling center and is the faculty adviser. As a licensed mental health practitioner, she is able to assist students in the group who may find they need to talk to someone but don’t want to go through the counseling center.

“There are no limits to recovery,” Campbell said. “Whatever you’re working on, we can always improve on it daily.”

The UNO club is one of 105 on campuses nationwide, and twice as many are in the works, said Darcy Gruttadaro, director of the NAMI Child and Adolescent Action Center. NAMI launched the campus campaign because a recent survey showed that students found a great need for awareness, acceptance and better training for staff on their campuses.

“Any young adult who is transitioning to college experiences many changes,” Gruttadaro said. “For those one in five who live with a mental health condition, it can present added stresses when moving away from services and support they’re used to getting from family and friends.”

They are likely getting less sleep and are eating differently, which have implications when you’re treating a mental health condition, she said. The NAMI campus clubs can hold educational sessions and stress-relief activities such as yoga and therapy dog visits and provide friendship and support.

For Weaver, a senior in general studies, she hopes the group can also be a platform to push for more respect.

Weaver, who also hosts a support group, said more awareness about mental illness and consideration for those suffering can improve the campus atmosphere for classmates who may not be as open as she is. She has been diagnosed with depression with psychosis, a term that sometimes brings that stigma she is working to eliminate.

“I am not my label,” she said.

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- » Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks
- » Severe, out-of-control, risk-taking behaviors
- » Sudden, overwhelming fear for no reason
- » Repeated use of drugs or alcohol
- » Seriously trying to harm or kill oneself, or making plans to do so
- » Not eating; throwing up to lose weight; significant weight gain or loss
- » Seeing, hearing or believing things that are not real
- » Drastic changes in mood, behavior, personality or sleep habits
- » Extreme difficulty concentrating or staying still
- » Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities

Source: National Alliance on Mental Illness

For more information:

- » UNO students can learn about NAMI on Campus from adviser Cheryl Campbell at cdcampbell@unomaha.edu
- » National, 24-hour suicide prevention help line: 800-273-8255
- » Find out more at nami.org

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