



## NAMI Delaware celebrates 4 decades of support and compassion

Delaware's grassroots leader on mental health issues is marking its 40th anniversary this year with a powerful schedule of events and a special campaign to reduce stigma and increase awareness.

"This year, we look forward to meeting new challenges while celebrating what has changed," said Dr. Joshua Thomas, CEO and executive director of NAMI Delaware. "Delaware has had major policy successes in just the last few years, while continuing to grow services and programs for friends and family members in need. But more obstacles remain, including deep misunderstandings about mental illness and a widespread shortage of mental health professionals."

Plans to celebrate the anniversary include a 40 Days of Caring social media campaign that spreads the message of support for people experiencing mental illness, their loved ones, and the NAMI volunteers who are the core of the organization. The campaign kicks off April 1 with the hashtag #40daysofcaringDE.

NAMI Delaware began with a small group of families gathered in a Wilmington church in spring 1983. Founders Jill and Simon Shute, parents of a son experiencing mental illness, had no idea that the seeds they sowed would be growing strong four decades later.

"NAMI has helped support countless family members and caregivers as they help their loved ones along their journeys," said Jill Shute. "We could not have imagined the community that has grown here and the compassion that NAMI spreads every day."





## Joshua Thomas

CEO/Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Forty years ago, NAMI Delaware was just getting its official start. Simon and Jill Shute gathered several parents who had adult children living with serious mental illness, to support one another. Those early founding members were champions for people affected by mental illness. People like Burley and Helga Melton are still active members.

The small group that helped found and expand NAMI Delaware had no way of knowing what the organization would be like four decades later. NAMI Delaware now offers a full menu of educational and support programs for loved ones and people living with mental illness. We lead the training for law enforcement to prepare them to de-escalate mental health crises. We advocate with government officials to improve our care system and ensure people with mental illness get the best care. We work every day to irradicate the stigma associated with mental health disorders.

We answer thousands of HelpLine calls a year, but in the early days, Simon and Jill answered those calls on their home phone. Their kitchen table served as the early boardroom table.

Volunteer board members recognized the critical need for safe and affordable housing for people with mental illness and launched what now is our housing program. We have a full-time housing staff of four professionals and house about 300 people a year in our 76 properties across Delaware.

We owe a debt of immense gratitude to our founding members. Our stature today proves what dedicated, passionate and committed people can accomplish when they toil to address a vital health issue. We are incredibly grateful to all who have supported our mission on this 40-year journey. We could not have done it without you.

With gratitude,

Joshua Thomas, Ph.D.  
CEO/Executive Director

# WELCOME TO THE LEGACY CIRCLE

## Legacy gift from Patterson estate to support NAMI programs

A generous gift from the estate of longtime supporters Dorothy and Richard Patterson of Wilmington will help keep NAMI education and support programs free to everyone.



The Pattersons were founders of NAMI Delaware alongside Jill and Simon Shute and were involved in the organization for many years. The Pattersons were predeceased by their son, Scott Patterson, in 2011, who lived with mental illness and worked as a peer support specialist.

Both Richard and Dorothy served as president of NAMI Delaware on separate occasions, recalled their son, Ross Patterson.

"There wasn't much infrastructure in terms of mental illness at the time," Ross Patterson said. "My mom in particular was a real warrior in terms of activism. It was a real calling in their lives." One of their proudest accomplishments was establishing supportive housing for people living with mental illness locally, he said.

Dorothy Patterson passed away in 2022 at age 93, and Richard Patterson in 2015 at age 86.

What would they have said to other people who need assistance for themselves or their loved ones? "Ask for help. Just ask," Ross Patterson said. "The help is out there, and don't live in shame or guilt. There are people out there that are going through the same thing and who are there to listen and support."

Friends of NAMI who wish to leave a gift to support programs and services through their will or trust can learn more at [www.namidelaware.org/legacy-circle](http://www.namidelaware.org/legacy-circle)



# Join NAMIWalks fundraiser stepping off May 13



We're looking for a few great supporters to join us at the annual NAMIWalks event, aiming to raise a record \$120,000 this year with 650 walkers!

NAMIWalks will take place Saturday, May 13, at Bellevue State Park. The 3-mile walk winds twice around the fitness trail; the route is crushed stone or paved pathway and accessible to people with disabilities. You can sign up to walk or donate at [namiwalks.org/Delaware](http://namiwalks.org/Delaware). Participants and supporters are encouraged to use the hashtag #Together4MH to help raise awareness. "It's our goal to become indispensable," Dr. Thomas said.

**When:** 9:30 a.m. registration opens, 10:40 a.m. NAMIWalks step-off

**Where:** Bellevue State Park, Figure 8 and Hunter barns, 2360 Lower Lot Road, Wilmington

**Food Vendors and Trucks:** BlueHen BBQ, Taco Jardin

**Fun:** Face painting, photo booth, more entertainment to be announced!

**Rain Plan:** In case of inclement weather, walkers can participate indoors at the barn.

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Greg Nemes | Operations Coordinator

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