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NAMI-Santa Clara County



Helpline (408) 453-0400 x1

February '24



nami
National Alliance on Mental Illness

NEWS

NAMI Gave Aakash Desai a Lifeline and He Gave Back

By Moryt Milo

Aakash Desai had a career trajectory similar to other young adults in Silicon Valley. He graduated from high school with an aptitude in computer science and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in computer engineering, then an MBA.

For the first ten years of his tech career he was doing well, until his life “began to fall apart.” Over the next decade, Desai said his diagnosis changed from psychosis depression to schizophrenia.

Looking back, the 39-year-old said, “Everyone knew something severe was going on with me. I thought it began in my twenties, but I think those prodromal symptoms were happening earlier.”

At 18, he went into anaphylactic shock from a nut reaction and was resuscitated. But he recalls back then complaining about memory loss and brain fog.

In his twenties as the disease progressed, he struggled to hold a job, until at age 30, he couldn’t hang on any longer. March 2015 was his last fulltime position.

“I fell into psychosis and the symptoms of schizophrenia became prevalent,” he said.

Desai’s psychosis became so severe he thought nanotechnology had taken over his mind and body.

“It felt like my brain was melting,” he said.

He was admitted to El Camino Hospital in 2016 but left after two days. His parents were worried the food served would trigger severe allergic reactions, after his near-death experience at 18. His parents took over his care. They took the Family-to-Family class and his sister found him a psychiatrist and therapist. Eventually, he landed at Stanford Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences clinics and the INSPIRE Clinic.

Desai was lucky to have open-minded, empathic parents who supported him. They understood he had a brain disease. He said that is not always the case in Indian culture.

“One time, a family member said to my father, ‘He is not listening to you guys, you should kick him out of the house,’” Aakash said. “To which my father said, ‘Would you kick your kid with cancer out of the house?’”

His parents asked him multiple times to read the Peer-to-Peer class pamphlet, but at the time he described himself “like a deer in headlights.” Then in 2017, he changed his mind and took the Peer-to-Peer class. It was a game changer.

“I had not been in a room with other people in a long time, and as people began to share their stories it became clearer to me something was wrong,” he said. “I realized the difficulties of the illness, the auditory hallucinations and delusions and all the stuff going on in my head.”

After taking the class and going to the Connections support group, he started volunteering in the NAMI-SCC office, helping with data entry. He said this was critical to his wellbeing. He didn’t feel so alone. It brought him out of isolation and gave him a sense of purpose.

His family is still his safety net, but he lives independently and is on a stable regimen. He has since worked as a research assistant at the Stanford Psychology Department and started his own investment business with a focus on mental health startups.

NAMI gave him a lifeline and he now returns his appreciation through donations for support groups and the helpline where people need immediate help.

“Giving back to NAMI financially after being helped by the nonprofit is good karma,” Desai said.

Election of Board Officers for 2024-2025

At the February General Meeting, we will be announcing the nominees for NAMI-SCC Board Officers for 2024-2025. The officers are President, 4 Vice Presidents, Treasurer, and Secretary. Our Bylaws dictate that we also accept nominations from the floor at the February and March general meetings and we will do so. Our annual election of officers will take place at the March 2024 General Meeting.

If you’d like to learn more about our Board of Directors, contact NAMI-SCC Board Vice President **Beverly Lozoff** at blozoff@namisantaclara.org

Holiday Drive



We all know the holidays are a warm reminder of the profound impact a caring community can have on individuals. Here are two messages that demonstrate this impact.

Message 1

Every year, I look forward to delivering the NAMI holiday gift bags to Marion Hall board and care home. There are 31 clients living in the home and so it is quite an event that everyone enjoys. My son, who lives in Marion Hall, sent a huge thank you to NAMI. In his words, “BEST BAGS EVER!” He said that everyone was so pleased with the gifts. They love receiving the gift cards and socks, and I always add a little chocolate. For some, this is their only gift of the year. To have a community that recognizes the aloneness of others and does so much to provide gentle loving care; it means more than anyone may ever imagine.

Thank you on behalf of Marion Hall, with love and hugs always.
—Nicole

Message 2

Thank you to our amazing team for preparing and managing today’s event! Thank you to our fellow team members from Office of Family Affairs and Office of Consumer Affairs for all your support today!

Thank you to Valley Health Foundation for all they did so we can plan this event! Thank you to NAMI for our yearly gift bags and to Krissy’s sister for the amazing desserts!

Thank you everyone for your hard work and dedication! The party is such a success and consumers were delighted with holiday joy.

Thank you NAMI and VHF for making this winter miracle a reality and supporting our consumers.

—Zephyr

General Meeting Information

Recap of January General Meeting: Ending the Silence

At the NAMI Santa Clara County General Meeting in January, the community was given an opportunity to learn more about one of our affiliate’s signature programs, Ending the Silence. The program is offered to middle- and high-school students at their schools in a comfortable setting where they learn it’s OK to talk about not feeling OK and that they don’t have to go through it alone. The emphasis is to seek out help for themselves or their friends.

The program is presented by two individuals—one who talks about her experience living with a mental illness, while the other presenter talks about early warning signs and important statistics such as the second leading cause of death for teens and young adults ages 15-24 is suicide. Two other versions of the program, one for teachers and another for families, are available.

Program presenter Alexia Worsham combined her presentation with her lived experience. She and her sister grew up with a mother who had schizophrenia, and now as a parent, she has two sons on the autism spectrum with mental health needs. She provided a wealth of personal knowledge along with important facts and advice.

Tiffany Austin talked about how she grew up struggling with depression and panic attacks in high school. After she lost her dog, she lost her desire to live, but she found a way back, and learned how to love herself through her advocacy for others. NAMI’s Peer-to-Peer class and volunteering at NAMI-SCC were pivotal to her stability.

To watch the presentation, [click here](#).



February 13 General Meeting Marico Sayoc: The State of Youth Mental Health

The media has been reporting on our youth mental health crisis. What is the current emotional health of teens? What tools are available to support our youth? What does school-based counseling look like and why is it effective? Marico Sayoc, our February General Meeting presenter, will discuss youth mental health and answer these questions and more.

Marico Sayoc is a community advocate who has dedicated her career to making positive impacts on social and environmental justice issues. She is the Executive Director of CASSY—Counseling and Support Services for Youth—a nonprofit that partners with Bay Area schools to provide resources and professional, on-campus mental health services to students free of charge.

Marico is the former Mayor of the Town of Los Gatos. In 2022, she was selected as a Woman of the Year by California Legislature Assembly District 28. Marico holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Science from U.C. Berkeley and a Master’s in Environmental Management from Duke University.

Marico began her career working for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and spent many years in the environmental field also working for the H. John Heinz III Center for Science, Economics and the Environment and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Be sure to register!

NOTE: Past General Meeting presentations can be viewed by going to our website, www.namisantaclara.org, under News & Events and clicking “General Meetings.”

Note About NAMI-Santa Clara County Board Meetings: NAMI-Santa Clara County’s Board of Directors meets ten times per year (except August and December) on the first Tuesday of the month at 5:30 P.M. The board meetings are open to the public and we welcome your attendance. Please check our website for location.

NAMIWalks Silicon Valley 2023: A Resounding Success!

By Llecenia Solorio

In the heart of Silicon Valley, NAMIWalks 2023 unfolded as a triumph of unity, compassion, and support. With a remarkable fundraising total of \$272,919, the community's dedication to mental health advocacy shone brightly. This success was made possible by the enthusiastic participation of 862 participants, each contributing to the cause in their unique way. The event, held at History Park in San Jose, saw a diverse array of participants and walkers, all driven by a shared commitment to break the stigma surrounding mental health.

As we reflect on our success, our focus now shifts to NAMI-Walks 2024. With the invaluable support received in 2023, we anticipate an even more impactful and inclusive event this year.

The momentum created in 2023 will undoubtedly carry forward, fostering increased awareness, understanding, and compassion for mental health. NAMI-Santa Clara County extends heartfelt thanks to every participant, donor, volunteer, and supporter who made NAMIWalks Silicon Valley 2023 a success. Your dedication is the driving force behind our mission, and we eagerly anticipate building on this success in the coming year.

Please visit this link for a small glimpse into NAMIWalks Silicon Valley 2023:

www.probonophoto.org/2023/7Oct23NAMISV



*thank you to
our donors*

NAMI-Santa Clara County is grateful to our many supporters for their continuing generosity. In the last five months, we received the following grants. These grants allow us to continue providing a wide range of programs to the public free of charge. If you know of any organizations that might be interested in funding our programs, please email our Executive Director, Rovina Nimbalkar, at nimbalkar@namisantaclara.org

- ◆ El Camino Healthcare District: \$50,000
- ◆ Cigna: \$100,000
- ◆ KLA Foundation: \$50,000
- ◆ NAMI Innovation Grant: \$100,000
- ◆ Korean American Community Foundation: \$25,000
- ◆ J. H. Robbins Foundation: \$5,000

Charitable Giving

Support Us With a Tax Deductible Vehicle Donation!

Donate your car, truck, motorcycle, or RV to NAMI-Santa Clara County by simply arranging pickup here: [Donate A Vehicle To NAMI-SCC](#)



The 12th Annual Directing Change Film Contest has launched. Students and young adults are invited to create films to start conversations about mental health and advocate for change. Films are due by March 1, 2024. Read more about submission categories and contest rules by going to www.directingchange.org

Santa Clara County Behavioral Health Board

By Frank Alioto

Get to know the Santa Clara County Behavioral Health Board.

Did you know it is possible to provide input directly to the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors as well as Santa Clara County Behavioral Health Services regarding mental health and substance use care? Until recently, neither did I.

The way to do this is to learn who your local members of the Santa Clara County Behavioral Health Board are.

This is easier than it sounds. Every county supervisor's district has three members on the Behavioral Health Board. Like myself, they are all volunteers. They are appointed as representatives by each supervisor and must reside in the appointing supervisor's district. There are 5 supervisors and 15 board members. Each district gets to appoint 3 members. The 15 members presently on the board are like our valley itself; in other words, the board



represents the rich diversity of our Silicon Valley ethnic and cultural heritage.

Your input about your own experiences with the mental health and substance use therapeutic systems are always welcome and will be submitted to the Board of Supervisors for consideration.

Please participate. It is one of the most effective ways we can bring about improvement and positive change within the behavioral health system in Santa Clara County. To get the name and contact information for your local Behavioral Health Board members, simply call the office of your district supervisor and ask them to put you in touch.

This is an opportunity to give direct input to those who can actually make a difference in improving the quality of psychiatric care for you or your loved one. Take advantage of this opportunity and let's make it happen!

Mental Health First Aid February / March

Adult Mental Health First Aid Training

The Behavioral Health Services' Cultural Communities Wellness Program (CCWP) is offering an Adult Mental Health First Aid training on February 28 and 29, 2024, as well as March 25 and 28. Participants will learn to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders.

Participants are required to attend both days of class to complete the course and receive a certificate. This training is free of charge and is provided to anyone living or working in the County of Santa Clara as it is funded by the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA). Contact peggy.cho@hhs.sccgov.org for registration.

Mental Health First Aid for Adults Who Work with Youth

There will also be a training for adults who work with youth on March 4 and 6.

All trainings take place at 175 E. Santa Clara St, San Jose, 2nd Floor

New Support Group

A new support group for family members and friends recently started. It takes place on the 1st Tuesday of the month from 7 to 8:30 P.M. This group meets in person at the NAMI-SCC office (1150 S Bascom Av Suite 24, San Jose).



SANTA CLARA COUNTY
Behavioral Health Services



Mental Health
FIRST AID

from NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR
MENTAL WELLBEING

Mental Health First Aid

Join the movement

Adult Mental Health First Aid

Date	Time
English 2/28/24 & 2/29/24	9:00am—1:00pm
English 3/25/24 & 3/28/24	12:30pm—4:30pm

Mental Health First Aid For Adults Who Work with Youth

Date	Time
English 3/4/24 & 3/6/24	9:00am - 1:00pm

Location of trainings
1075 E. Santa Clara Street, 2nd Floor
San Jose, CA 95116



Family Outreach and Engagement Program

This free training is for individuals who live or work in the County of Santa Clara.

Contact Peggy Cho at 408-792-3916, Peggy.Cho@hhs.sccgov.org for registration (email preferred)
Please register at least one week before the training. We reserve the right to reschedule if less than 5 registrants.
You may request a training at your location if you have at least 10 attendees.



A person you know could be experiencing a mental health or substance use problem.

Learn an action plan to help.

You are more likely to encounter someone in an emotional or mental crisis than someone having a heart attack. Learn how to help a friend, family member, coworker or neighbor in need. Anyone 18 and older can take Mental Health First Aid.

NAMI-Santa Clara County Community Resource & Support Center

1150 S Bascom Av #24, San Jose, CA 95128
Ph: 408-453-0400 Fax: 408-453-2100

Website: www.namisantaclara.org

Email: office@namisantaclara.org

Office Hours: 10 A.M.—6 P.M. M–F

To reach our Helpline, call 408-453-0400, Opt 1;
After hours, press Opt 4.

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JOIN AND BECOME A NAMI MEMBER NOW!

NAMI membership enables you to subscribe to the latest mental health updates, participate in online discussion groups, learn how to advocate in your community and add your voice to the mental health movement.

JOIN NAMI NOW!

