

## **Volunteers Needed to Help Mentally III**

May 30, 2008 - 10:06 p.m.

EDITOR'S NOTE: May is National Mental Health Month. This is the last of a three part series on mental health in Victoria. Volunteer Patsy Weppler is president of the local affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Q: How did you get involved with NAMI?

A: Due to a letter to the editor I wrote to the Advocate about what happened when a good friend of mine and I took a loved one to a local hospital. This person wanted to commit suicide. After a long wait, a doctor finally decided that the person needed to be admitted for safety. I was put out by the way things were handled. After my letter hit the paper, Don Polzin of Gulf Bend Center called. During our conversation, he asked if I wanted to go to a NAMI convention in San Antonio. After attending, I knew the Victoria community needed a NAMI affiliate. Most people out there do not have a clue about mental illness.

Q: When did the local NAMI affiliate get started and how has it grown?

A: In 2005 we had our first organizational meeting. It took a year and a half to get our non-profit status. We now have about 50 volunteer members. There are several doctors and therapists who donate their time to give presentations at our meetings. Our goal is to find a building to set up a local NAMI office. NAMI offers many programs that teach family members how to cope with mental illness as well as people with mental illness learning how to deal with their personal illness. Our purpose is education, support and advocacy.

Q: What else is important to talk about on this topic?

A: To get across to the public that most people are born with mental illness. Mental illness is treatable and there is recovery. We need to stop talking about mental illness behind closed doors.