MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDIA: From the Executive Director

Netflix’s new release 13 Reasons Why has really gotten people talking! Parents, teens, teachers, school administrators, and mental health professionals are buzzing about whether the series raises awareness about suicide prevention, or if it does more harm than good in its depiction of high school bullying and teen suicide. With suicide as the third leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24, suicide prevention is an important and even life-saving topic.

We’ve been working on a list of “recommended reads” for the newsletter, and I chose not to include the book by Jay Asher, on which the series is based, because something about the description didn’t sit right with me. Then, a few weeks later, the Netflix series came out. Friends who are teachers started to ask me about it. I watched it this weekend so I could share an informed opinion. Finally, what bothered me about the description of the book clicked - it was the idea that there were 13 people to blame in the suicide of the main character.

There were pluses and minuses to the story, but overall, I have a lot of concerns about the graphic depiction of suicide and the underlying theme of blame throughout the story. There are two things I want to emphasize: 1) suicide is no one’s fault, and 2) graphic suicide imagery increases young people’s risk for suicide.

There was also no real discussion of mental illness throughout the series – given that 90% of people who die from suicide have an underlying diagnosable mental health condition, omitting this from the story is a serious oversight. We know that 50% of lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, and this was a missed opportunity to bring greater attention to mental health conditions in youth and early detection.
One thing the series does well is its depiction of the social pressures that young people face. As an adult, it is easy to forget how intense every emotion and even the smallest social circle disruptions felt during your teen years. Many times throughout the show I thought “If any of them would just reach out to one grown up…” but as a teenager, some experiences feel insurmountable, completely isolating, and like the end of the world - and sometimes it’s hard to believe that anyone else could understand.

Anyone who is parenting or supporting a young person should watch this series if only to be reminded of the intensity of emotions and relationships that the teen years bring with them, and the secret, hidden challenges teens often face. It’s our job to give young people the support they need to navigate mental health issues and social pressures. I would not recommend this series for young people who are experiencing suicidal thoughts or have struggled with them previously.

Having representation of mental health conditions in the media is so important – but it’s even more important to portray mental health conditions and suicide safely and responsibly. Be sure to check out our list of recommended reads for both teens and parents starting on page 8.

Ashley Fontaine
Executive Director

Call 1-866-TEEN-LINK (866-833-6546) to talk with a teen volunteer for support from 6pm-10pm Pacific time or chat online at 866teeenlink.org/chat-now

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WHEN A CLASSMATE DIES FROM SUICIDE  By Lacy Nguyen

Throughout my four years as a high school student, the subject of mental health was something that was rarely discussed in school. While we had many different educational assemblies about cultural awareness and being kind to others, we never once had a discussion about the importance of good mental health care. As someone who had struggled with their own mental health, this frustrated and confused me.

It wasn’t until my senior year of high school that I saw the detrimental effects of the stigma that surrounds mental health. One month before school began, a close friend of mine died by suicide. Her absence made going back to school extremely difficult for me and many other students. We all had to endure grieving over a loved one, while simultaneously balancing the stress of a new school year.

During the first couple months of school, I noticed that the teachers and administration did not address the recent loss in our community. I was confused as to why there was no school wide discussion on suicide prevention or mental health care. In light of my friend’s suicide, it seemed appropriate for students to learn about the importance of reaching out for help if they were struggling. Instead, the school was silent about her death. No announcements, no statements, nothing.

Looking back, I understand that the subject of suicide was a difficult one for my school’s administration to tackle. I was told by many teachers that the school feared suicide contagion as a result of discussing the topic. However, I also understand that lack of awareness surrounding the topic is dangerous and destructive. I witnessed firsthand many students at my school struggle with their mental health after losing a friend to suicide. Many of them were scared and
confused, and they grieved in secret because there had been no public conversation about the grieving process or suicide at school.

Doing nothing in the face of a student taking their own life is the wrong response. Adults cannot expect students to know anything about proper mental health care without educating the students themselves. Even though suicide is a sensitive topic that is extremely challenging to talk about, it’s even worse to stay silent about it. I’m sure it wasn’t their intention, but by staying silent, my school contributed to the mental health stigma that causes so many students to struggle in secret and never reach out for help.

As a student, I would have felt better supported if the school would have taken the initiative to acknowledge my friend’s death, and help guide me and other students in the grieving process. I wanted to do something to honor my friend’s life, but I didn’t know how to do it without glorifying suicide. Had there been more guidance from grief counselors, I would not have felt so confused or guilty for not knowing how to honor her.

There are resources and programs available to educate students and staff about suicide prevention. There are ways to grieve over a death by suicide without glorifying it. Often people are so afraid to talk about suicide that they do not talk about it all. This is something that must change. Many local mental health nonprofits like NAMI Seattle and Forefront offer free mental health awareness presentations for schools. Schools can use these resources to create a stigma-free community, help students improve their mental health, and even save lives.

**KNOW THE SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS**  [from intheforefront.org]

- Talking about suicide or a wish to die, for example, statements like “I wish I were dead” or “I wish I hadn’t been born”
- Talking about feeling trapped, desperate, or needing to escape from an intolerable situation
- Getting the means to take one’s life, such as buying a gun or stockpiling pills
- Feelings of being a burden to others
- Losing interest in things, or losing the ability to experience pleasure
- Becoming socially isolated and withdrawn
- Acting irritable or agitated
- Saying goodbye or giving away personal belongings
- Showing rage, or talking about seeking revenge for being victimized or rejected, whether or not the situations the person describes seem real

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Does your school need suicide prevention tools?

Forefront: Innovations in Suicide Prevention has resources for schools, parents, teachers, and other professionals.

Visit intheforefront.org/schools/k12
Much Ado about Mental Health Month:

We’ve got tons of great ways for you to get involved!

**Sunday, May 7**

**Corepower Yoga in the Park at Green Lake**
(72nd and Green Lake Way)
10am-11am

Join NAMI volunteer Jade Shibata at beautiful Green Lake Park for a refreshing morning of mind-body connection. Jade is an instructor at Corepower Yoga and this yoga session is appropriate for all levels, even beginner yogis! Move at your own pace during this mindful practice. We’ll be on the grass behind the community center.

**Suggested donation: $10**
**BYOM: Bring your own mat!**

With your donation, you’ll be entered to win a full month of yoga at Corepower University District!

**Eat at Green Lake Bar & Grill they’ll give 10% to NAMI Seattle!**

When you grab dinner at Green Lake Bar & Grill on May 7, 10% of what you spend benefits NAMI Seattle!

**ABOUT JADE**

**How did you first get into yoga?**
I first got into yoga in high school with a few of my friends. I had always heard amazing things about yoga and how it made people feel so I figured why not try it. After my first class, I walked out feeling completely blissful and I knew that I would be back again the next day. I loved learning all of the different poses and their variations. I felt as if I could express myself through my movement and let go of any insecurities or doubts I was holding on to. To say the least, yoga made me feel empowered, which is why I still practice today.

**How has yoga been positive for your mental health?**
I find my mat to be a special place where I can unwind and let go. Whether I am laying in child’s pose or working up a sweat, my breath is the most important component of my practice. On days when I feel anxious and overwhelmed, I immediately turn towards my mat. I may walk on to my mat feeling worried, upset, or sad, but by the end of my practice, my entire perspective shifts. I feel calm, grounded, and present. Yoga teaches me to take a step back from all of the chaos in my life and do nothing else but simply move and breathe. I continue to notice how this practice of mindfulness translates into my everyday life and I strive to inspire others to explore their own potential with yoga and meditation.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
Recent studies suggest that yoga modulates the stress response and improves mood!
Wednesday, May 10

GiveBIG: Now, more than ever.
Double your impact with our dollar for dollar match, up to $10,000!

GiveBIG has always been a one-day philanthropy extravaganza - except this year, you can schedule your gift early at givebigseattle.org/namiseattle. Set it and forget it!

Your gift addresses the unmet mental health needs in our community and builds a world where everyone impacted by mental health conditions knows they are not alone. You can get us to our $20,000 goal!

Thursday, May 11

“Crazywise” Screening at SPU [Bertona 6]
7pm-9pm
103 West Bertona, Seattle, WA 98119

Crazywise adds a voice to the growing conversation that a psychological crisis can be an opportunity for growth and potentially transformational, not a disease with no cure. Join us to screen the film, with discussion to follow with clinician and film interviewee Dwayne Stone.

See page 6 for a synopsis of the film, or watch the trailer at crazywisefilm.com/#trailer.

Tuesday, May 16

Understanding Eating Disorders
Educational Forum with NAMI Eastside
7pm-9pm
16225 NE 87th St., Suite A9, Redmond, WA 98052

This presentation by Dr. Michelle Wedig will cover basic information about eating disorders, their prevalence, various types of eating disorders, and treatment options. The presentation will also cover some of the underlying causes that might result in eating disordered behaviors and how sufferers might address these. We will cover “red flags” to look for if you suspect you or someone you know and love might have an eating disorder.

Thursday, May 18

Journey of the Heroic Parent:
Parenting Youth with Mental Health Conditions
Speaker Series with NAMI Seattle
6:30pm-8pm (Doors open at 6pm)
2100 24th Avenue South (The 2100 Building)
Seattle, WA 98144

Dr. Brad Reedy is the author of “Journey of the Heroic Parent” (see page 8 for more information
What can we learn from those who have turned their psychological crisis into a positive transformative experience? During a quarter-century documenting indigenous cultures, human-rights photographer and filmmaker Phil Borges often saw these cultures identify “psychotic” symptoms as an indicator of shamanic potential. He was intrigued by how differently psychosis is defined and treated in the West.

Through interviews with renowned mental health professionals, Phil explores the growing severity of the mental health crisis in America dominated by biomedical psychiatry. He discovers a growing movement of professionals and psychiatric survivors who demand alternative treatments that focus on recovery, nurturing social connections, and finding meaning.

The film follows two young Americans diagnosed with mental illness. Adam, 27, suffers devastating side effects from medications before embracing meditation in hopes of recovery. Ekhaya, 32, survives childhood molestation and several suicide attempts before spiritual training to become a traditional South African healer gives her suffering meaning and brings a deeper purpose to her life.

CRAZYWISE doesn’t aim to over-romanticize indigenous wisdom, or completely condemn Western treatment. Not every indigenous person who has a crisis becomes a shaman. And many individuals benefit from Western medications.

However, indigenous peoples’ acceptance of non-ordinary states of consciousness, along with rituals and metaphors that form deep connections to nature, to each other, and to ancestors, is something we can learn from. CRAZYWISE adds a voice to the growing conversation that believes a psychological crisis can be an opportunity for growth and potentially transformational, not a disease with no cure.

Dr. Reedy’s presentation will be followed by discussion and audience questions about how to effectively parent youth with mental health conditions.

**Friday, May 19**

**Delightful Deserts: Silent Pottery Auction at Fayezart**
6:30pm-8:30pm
1806 NW 70th St., Seattle, WA 98117

Stop by Fayezart Studio just down 70th for this tasty silent auction! Artists of the studio have created handmade desert dishes, plates, and other pottery for auction, all to benefit NAMI Seattle in support of youth mental health. Light refreshments, too! Entry fee: $25

**Friday, May 26**

**Brighter Days Project: Benefit Concert with Manifide**
7:30pm
The Hillman City Collaboratory
5623 Rainier Ave. S., Seattle, WA 98118

Tickets: $15 General Admission (all ages!)

As part of their Brighter Days Project to raise awareness for mental health month, local band Manifide has put together the Brighter Days Showcase featuring Tyler Edwards and Vicious Petals, accompanied by Manifide’s Orchestra. All proceeds benefit NAMI Seattle and Community Arts Create.

**Wednesday, May 31**

**“Crazywise” Screening at PNA**
6532 Phinney Ave N, Seattle, WA 98103
7pm-9pm (doors open at 6:30pm)

Join us for a second screening of the film and discussion to follow with filmmaker Phil Borges.

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on his book) and Dr. Reedy is the Co-founder and Clinical Director for Evoke Therapy Programs. His work work with families, parents, couples, professionals, and individuals seeks to shed light on how we relate to each other.
Volunteer CENTRAL

MOST VALUABLE VOLUNTEER
This Edition’s MVV: Quinn Sullivan

Quinn, you’re a relatively new volunteer - tell us about yourself!
I’m a 31 year old transgender individual who also happens to have treatment resistant bipolar disorder. I spent the past few years weaving a myriad of cognitive and dialectical skills into my daily living and have been drifting closer toward ongoing stability ever since. I write a lot and it allows me a chance to share my experiences with bipolar disorder, anxiety, and psychosis with others to help build a sense of community and normalcy around mental health.

What inspired you to get involved with NAMI Seattle?
I only recently reached the point in my recovery to start getting out and volunteering but I knew I wanted to do something that would support the mental health community in Seattle. Over the years I’ve attended many of NAMI’s free support groups and their peer-to-peer class so they seemed like a great place to start.

What’s the project you’re working on?
Did you know NAMI Seattle’s office has a library in it? I didn’t! It is pretty impressive, everything from reference books like the DSM-V to self-help books to memoirs written by people who have experienced all manner of diagnoses. I’ve been working on revamping the library a bit because for being such an awesome resource, not a lot of people know about it. I am currently in the process of adding a catalogue of the titles NAMI has online so if you’re curious about what kind of books the library has, if you’re looking for a book on a specific mental health topic, or if you’re just looking for recommended reading stay tuned!

What would you tell other folks who are considering volunteering?
I have been stepping back into volunteering after a break of five years and honestly I was a little nervous about it. When I first started looking for a volunteer position NAMI didn’t have anything available that met the needs I had so I wasn’t sure if volunteering would work out. Thankfully I took the time to talk with the staff about my limitations and they were very receptive, reaching out to me when a project came along that was more appropriate for me. I think being open about my needs and finding a project that was right for me has made a serious difference during such a big transition.

The NAMI Seattle Library is open to members during business hours. Check out our “recommended reads” on the opposite page in honor of Mental Health Month. Many of these titles are available in the NAMI Seattle Library.

Thanks to Quinn’s hard work cataloguing, we’ll have an updated list of all of our titles available online soon!
RECOMMENDED READS FOR MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

10 Books for Teens

1. **Crazy** by Han Nolan (Grades 7-10)

Fifteen-year-old Jason has fallen on bad times—his mother has died and his father has succumbed to mental illness. As he tries to hold his crazy father and their crumbling home together, Jason relies on a host of imaginary friends for guidance. Both heartbreaking and funny, Crazy provides more of the intense and compelling characters Han Nolan is praised for.

2. **It's Kind of a Funny Story** by Ned Vizzini (Grades 9-12)

Like many ambitious New York City teenagers, Craig Gilner sees entry into Manhattan's Executive Pre-Professional High School as the ticket to his future. Determined to succeed at life—which means getting into the right high school to get into the right college to get the right job—Craig studies night and day to ace the entrance exam, and does. That's when things start to get crazy. Ned Vizzini, who himself spent time in a psychiatric hospital, has created a remarkably moving tale about the sometimes unexpected road to happiness. For a novel about depression, it's definitely a funny story.

3. **Challenger Deep** by Neal Shusterman (Grades 9+)

Caden Bosch lives in two worlds. One is his real life with his family, his friends, and high school. There he is paranoid for no reason, thinks people are trying to kill him, and demonstrates obsessive compulsive behaviors. In his other world, he's part of the crew for a pirate captain on a voyage to the Challenger Deep, the ocean's deepest trench. There he's paranoid, wary of the mercurial captain and his mutinous parrot, and tries hard to interpret the mutterings of his fellow shipmates as they sail uncharted waters toward unknown dangers. Slowly, Caden's fantasy and paranoia begin to take over, until his parents have only one choice left. Shusterman based the novel on his son's mental illness, and Brendan's input regarding his diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder and psychiatric care makes the novel ring true.

4. **OCD Love Story** by Corey Ann Haydu (Grades 9+)

After the lights go out at the high-school dance, Bea discovers fellow-student Beck in the dark, and she talks him through his panic attack. The teens meet again in obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) group therapy. Beck is a repeater and a germaphobe—textbook OCD. Readers will easily accept what might, in the hands of a less skillful writer, seem like plot conveniences and connect with the well-drawn Bea and Beck. A compelling portrait of teen behavioral disorders and the struggle to overcome or, at the very least, balance them.

5. **The Nature of Jade** by Deb Caletti (Grades 9+)

After a few months of watching the webcam, Jade decides to volunteer at the elephant house where she meets Sebastian, a 19-year-old single dad with a secret of his own. Jade finds herself falling in love with him and her panic attacks become less frequent. She discovers an inner strength that allows her to take chances and make decisions not based on fear, but on love. Deb Caletti's novel (S & S, 2007) about a flawed family trying to smooth its edges, teenage angst, and the healing power of young love.
6. **Paperweight** by Meg Haston (Grades 8+)

Paperweight follows seventeen-year-old Stevie's journey as she struggles not only with a life-threatening eating disorder, but with the question of whether she can ever find absolution for the mistakes of her past…and whether she truly deserves to.

7. **Made You Up** by Francesca Zappia (Grades 9+)

Reality, it turns out, is often not what you perceive it to be—sometimes, there really is someone out to get you. For fans of Silver Linings Playbook and Liar, this thought-provoking debut tells the story of Alex, a high school senior—and the ultimate unreliable narrator—unable to tell the difference between real life and delusion.

8. **These Gentle Wounds** by Helene Dunbar (Grades 9+)

Five years after an unspeakable tragedy, Gordie Allen is living with his half-brother Kevin, the only person who can protect Gordie at school and keep him focused on getting his life back on track. But just when it seems like things are becoming normal, Gordie’s biological father comes back into the picture, demanding a place in his life. Now there's nothing to stop Gordie from falling into a tailspin that could cost him everything—including his relationship with Sarah, the first girl he's ever trusted. With his world spinning out of control, the only one who can help Gordie is himself . . . if he can find the strength to confront the past and take back his future.

9. **Stop Pretending** by Sonya Sones (Grades 6-9)

Based on award-winning author Sonya Sones's own true story, this novel explores the chilling landscape of mental illness, revealing glimmers of beauty and of hope along the way. Told in a succession of short and powerful poems, it takes us deep into the cyclone of the narrator’s emotions: despair, anger, guilt, resentment, and ultimately, acceptance.

10. **The Teenage Guide to Stress** by Nicola Morgan (Grades 9+)

Essential reading for teenagers and the adults who care about them. The Teenage Guide to Stress clearly explains the biology behind stress and, crucially, a huge range of strategies and suggestions to deal with it and prevent negative symptoms. A list of useful resources completes this fantastically wide-ranging, reassuring, eye-opening and comprehensive guide for young people, empowering them to take control of their mental health.

“Neal makes Caden such a believable character and it’s impossible not to root for him. We see him muddled as a result of the drugs that he is given, we see him when the lines between reality and the imaginary start blurring and we see him coherent. **I think what makes Caden so incredibly fantastic to read about is that even within all these various phases we see him in, nothing can strip him of what makes him, him.**” - Goodreads Review on *Challenger Deep*
10 Books for Parents

1. I am Not Sick, I Don’t Need Help! by Xavier Amador

This book is not just a reference for mental health practitioners or law enforcement professionals. It is a must-read guide for family members whose loved ones are battling mental illness. Read and learn as have hundreds of thousands of others...to LEAP: Listen, Empathize, Agree, and Partner—and help your patients and loved ones accept treatment.

2. The Price of Silence by Liza Long

The Price of Silence, which grew out of the author’s article “I am Adam Lanza’s Mother” after the Newtown shooting, looks at how society stigmatizes mental illness—including in children—and the devastating societal cost.

3. The Journey of the Heroic Parent by Brad Reedy

The Journey of the Heroic Parent will take you on a journey to a happier, healthier relationship with your struggling child—and yourself. Through lessons learned, mother, father, and child will achieve greater understanding, love, and humanity—no matter what the outcome.

4. Willow Weep for Me by Meri Nana-Ama Danquah

Examines the author’s personal struggle with depression, the hidden roots of her illness, the effect it had on her life, and her ability to cope with the disease.

5. This Fragile Life: A Mother’s Story of a Bipolar Son by Charlotte Pierce-Baker

The moving story of an African American family facing the challenge of bipolar disorder, This Fragile Life provides insight into mental disorders as well as family dynamics. Pierce-Baker traces the evolution of her son’s illness and, in looking back, realizes she mistook warning signs for typical child and teen behavior. This Fragile Life weaves a fascinating story of mental illness, race, family, the drive of African Americans to succeed, and a mother’s love for her son.

6. It’s Nobody’s Fault by Dr. Harold Kopelwicz

People who wouldn’t dream of blaming parents for a child’s asthma or diabetes are often quick to blame bad parenting for a child’s hyperactivity, depression, or school phobia. The parents, in turn, often blame their children, believing that they’re lazy or rebellious. Even worse, the children with these psychological problems often blame themselves, convinced that they’re just bad kids. In It’s Nobody’s Fault, esteemed child and adolescent psychiatrist Dr. Harold S. Kopelwicz at last puts an end to this pointless—and erroneous—cycle of blame and helps parents get the help they need for their troubled children.

7. My Age of Anxiety by Scott Stossel

Drawing on his own longstanding battle with anxiety, Scott Stossel presents a moving and revelatory account of a condition that affects some 40 million Americans. Stossel offers an intimate and authoritative history of efforts by scientists, philosophers, and writers to understand anxiety. We discover the well-known who have struggled with the condition, as well as the afflicted generations of Stossel’s own family.

8. Marbles by Ellen Forney

Darkly funny and intensely personal, Forney’s memoir provides a visceral glimpse into the effects of a mood disorder on an artist’s work, as she shares her own story through bold black-and-white images and evocative prose.

9. The Teenage Guide to Stress by Nicola Morgan (see the full description on page 8, we recommend this for both teens and parents!)

10. Behind the Wall: The True Story of Mental Illness as Told by Parents by Mary Widdifield

Behind the Wall: The True Story of Mental Illness as Told by Parents provides a shared voice for millions of people who advocate for a child or loved one living with mental illness, fosters understanding for society at-large, and delivers an ultimately hopeful read.
Time Will Heal the Hurt
Author Unknown

The sadness of the present days is locked and set in time, and moving to the future is a slow and painful climb.

But all the feelings that are now so vivid and so real can't hold their fresh intensity as time begins to heal.

No wound so deep will ever go entirely away yet every hurt becomes a little less from day to day.

Nothing can erase the painful imprints on your mind but there are softer memories that time will let you find.

Though your heart won't let the sadness simply slide away the echoes will diminish even though the memories stay.
OFFICE HOURS
The NAMI Seattle office is staffed 9am–5pm Monday- Thursday with evening Helpline hours on Wednesdays from 5pm-7pm.

Callers to our Helpline 206-783-9264 will reach a staff member, intern or volunteer who will offer supportive resources and referrals.

FIND US ONLINE
www.namiseattle.org
For support group calendars, class information, scholarship & volunteer applications

COMING SOON....
Having you been waiting to get a new copy of Connections?

Good news!

Our new guidebook will be ready for purchase before the end of Mental Health Month!

Roadmap to Mental Health: Navigating the System in Puget Sound
Email selena@namiseattle.org to request a notification when Roadmap is officially released.

NAMI Seattle has two open AmeriCorps positions which start September 1, 2017:

Helpline Coordinator: https://goo.gl/quRtwM
Outreach & Program Assistant: https://goo.gl/D3hGXr

The deadline to apply is June 7! AmeriCorps positions are contingent on available funding. Links to position applications are also available on our website at namiseattle.org.