



## Mental health organization to host first NAMI Walks event in the state

Christie Lovvorn | AL.com Contributor By Christie Lovvorn | AL.com Contributor

on May 13, 2014 at 1:56 PM, updated May 13, 2014 at 1:57 PM

MOBILE, Alabama -- The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) will host the first NAMI Walks event in Alabama May 17 at Spring Hill College.

"The purpose of the walk is to celebrate our progress, whether it's a baby step or a major victory, a promising new drug or innovative treatment, a recovery or simply another day of successfully managing this complex illness," said walk manager Susan Nelson Pickard. "We walk to support each other and to let others know that they are not alone. We walk to raise money because money is the means by which we improve the lives of people living with mental illness."

NAMI Walks volunteer Sherry Coker recently became involved with the organization after her loved one was diagnosed with a mental illness. She said a physician recommended they look up NAMI online and after doing so, she attended a NAMI Walks meeting.

"They were gracious and welcoming," said Coker. "They told me of the NAMI programs and all the support here in Mobile."

NAMI programs are free to the public and include monthly mental illness education meetings, support groups, newsletters and other resources on mental health topics. There are programs geared toward individuals with mental illness, towards parents of children with mental illness and some for caregivers.

Coker said she believes education is key to proper diagnosis and treatment options for persons experiencing mental illness.

"There's a wealth of resources and information out there," said Coker. "People don't realize it early enough so they can educate themselves and find answers to their questions. There was a video on the NAMI website that said if you're concerned your loved one is suffering from mental illness, you're probably right. But many people don't know what the next step is and a lot of times the person has to be ready to accept help. If people were better educated about the symptoms, they might know the signs to look for and could get their loved one help earlier. Otherwise, a diagnosis can be overlooked and a critical point in their care can be missed."

Thirty teams, including nine from AltaPointe Health Systems, have already registered for the walk. NAMI Mobile's fundraising goal for the event is \$50,000 of which they have already raised \$48,000.

The walk's honorary chairperson City Council President Gina Gregory will kick off the 5K walk at 9 a.m. in front of St. Joseph Chapel. There will also be a shorter, alternate route for walkers.

"We'll have a bouncy castle, a clown, face painting and balloons for the kids. A DJ will be spinning dance tunes and we'll have an aerobic warm up," said Pickard. "We'll serve refreshments, offer health screenings and give away prizes. Various exhibitors will be on hand to give out information and gifts."

Registration is free, but walkers must raise \$100 or more to receive a NAMIWalk Mobile t-shirt. To register, visit [www.namiwalks.org/mobile](http://www.namiwalks.org/mobile).

© 2014 AL.com. All rights reserved.