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Mental health group nominates new leader

by Laura Johnson

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A local chapter of a mental health advocacy organization is now planning for the future, even though just last week it seemed to have no future at all.

Organizers of the Jacksonville chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, or NAMI, had been expecting to dissolve their group because its current president, Terry McLemore, is moving. But that expectation itself dissolved this week when the organization's vice president, social worker Gloria Johnson, was nominated to replace her.

"It's a great relief," McLemore said. "It looks like we're going to get some new energy."

Although Johnson has been nominated for the position, and said she's willing to take it, she won't formally become president unless the NAMI chapter's board votes in favor of the move. If it does, it will leave a vacancy at the position of vice president, which JSU counselor Linda Shelton was nominated to fill.

"We'll approve them; it's just that we will officially nominate and elect them at our next meeting," which will be held May 14 McLemore said.

NAMI is a national organization with state and local chapters. It exists to provide education about mental illness and to advocate for and support people who have mental illnesses, said Wanda Laird, executive director of NAMI Alabama.

She said she was pleased that the Jacksonville chapter is moving forward with plans to stay active and added that the organization is trying to establish new chapters across the state, in places such as St. Clair County and Gadsden.

"We are just really, truly wanting to establish as many affiliates as possible across the state," Laird said.

The local chapter of NAMI has offered programs designed at the state and national levels to help the mentally ill and their family members, Laird said. It helps local people find help after attempted suicides, has helped parents obtain assistance for their children and it has sought answers for people grappling with schizophrenia.

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