

PUTTING OUR
HEADS TOGETHER.

2021 | ANNUAL REPORT

 **NAMI** | Metropolitan
National Alliance on Mental Illness Baltimore



NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Every cloud has a silver lining, and while this past year has pushed us all to our limits and we've had to dig deeper than ever to find that small hint of silver, it is there. There's a buzz about mental health like there's never been before. If this year has taught us anything at NAMI Metro Baltimore, it's that providing resources and support to our community is more important than ever. Even before the pandemic, there was a significant need for mental health services in greater Baltimore. And now, one in three people say the pandemic has left them feeling anxious or depressed. It's critical that we engage in conversation about our mental health. This is our moment, our silver lining.

I am so proud of all NAMI Metro Baltimore has accomplished through this last challenging year. We persevered, despite the hurdles in our path. Through education, support groups, presentations and programming—in our classrooms, on campus, at work, in your neighborhood, and, yes, even on Zoom—we have been here for you. We're a small staff with a dedicated board and an incredible group of volunteers. We're putting our heads together to create change. Together, we can break stigma. Together, we can end the silence. Together, we can support families. Together, we can support each other. Will you join us?

“ONE IN THREE PEOPLE SAY THE PANDEMIC HAS LEFT THEM FEELING ANXIOUS OR DEPRESSED.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kerry Graves".

Kerry Graves, Executive Director, NAMI Metropolitan Baltimore

**MISSION
& VISION**

NAMI Metropolitan Baltimore improves the lives of individuals living with mental health conditions, their families, and communities through education, support, and advocacy. We envision a world where all people affected by mental illness live healthy, fulfilling lives supported by a community that cares.

BY THE NUMBERS

2021

In fiscal year 2021, NAMI Metropolitan Baltimore provided **9,000 TOUCHPOINTS** to community members affected by mental health conditions

2010 HOURS



Were donated by 79 incredible **volunteers** to lead our support groups, classes, presentations, and other programs

Family Support Group

+ **88%**



ATTENDANCE INCREASE

Connections Support Group

+ **155%**



10x



We reached more than 10x the number of people through **Ending the Silence**, a school-based program for youth aged 12–17, their parents and families, and school staff that teaches the signs of a mental health condition and how to seek help



REACHED
1,500
EMPLOYEES

We tripled our reach in the workplace, reaching nearly 1,500 employees through **I Will Listen**, our corporate anti-stigma campaign

PANDEMIC IMPACT

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has significantly impacted the mental health of our community and highlighted existing inequities in communities of color. Anxiety and depression are on the rise. We have seen a sharp increase in suicidal ideation. NAMI Metropolitan Baltimore worked rapidly to increase support groups, classes, programming and trainings—reaching out to our most vulnerable populations at a time of great need.



ZERO the number of hours of staff time reduced or lost due to COVID-19. In direct response to the pandemic, NAMI Metro Baltimore increased staff in FY21, and will welcome additional staff members in the next fiscal year.



100%
of our programs transitioned to a virtual format.

“ With the current deadly virus threat and the requirement that everyone stay inside their homes, it is doubly (and sometimes triply) depressing and lonely. For me, this support group was a positive and uplifting experience and I plan to attend every meeting. I’m not always this upbeat, **but I know that the people I met will help me through**, what I call, my dark days. ”

—Virtual NAMI Connection Support Group Participant

HIGHLIGHTS

DID YOU KNOW?

NAMI Metro Baltimore spent **500 HOURS** in FY21 developing, planning and implementing trainings for officers, cadets, and 911 and dispatch operators responding to behavioral health calls

NAMI Metro Baltimore also partners with the Baltimore City Police Department through the Department of Justice's consent decree to direct reforms to police interactions with individuals experiencing behavioral health challenges.



NAMI Metro Baltimore hosted two mandatory **diversity and inclusion trainings** for staff, volunteers, and board members addressing race equity and cultural competence.



NAMI Metro Baltimore created and delivered **racial trauma presentations**, featuring volunteers with lived experience who facilitated open conversation about race and mental health.



INCREASED REACH

300%

We saw a nearly 300% increase in individuals reached through our **community events** including mental health forums and outreach events.

160%

In FY21, NAMI Metro Baltimore expanded our **Rapid Referral Program**: an outreach initiative with a goal to more efficiently and effectively connect individuals living with a mental health condition and their family and caregivers to NAMI programming and other community-based support services. We brought on 3 new partners resulting in a 160% increase in people reached.



Frederick Mclver

CONNECTION
SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATOR

→ The summer of 2019 was one of the most challenging seasons of Fred Mclver's life. He'd hit something close to a rock bottom: After a run in with the law, he was living back home with his mother, dreading a requirement of his sentencing: court-appointed counseling. Talking about mental health was not something that he, as a Black man living in Baltimore, had ever seen normalized.

Then he met his therapist: A Black man. One who also lived in Baltimore, not far from Mclver.

"It was very hard for me to come out of my shell and share, but once I did, things just took off," says Mclver, who felt emboldened by their similarities. "I was able to begin to understand what was wrong with me: I had a lot of anger, resentment, fear, guilt, and shame that I didn't even realize I was struggling with."

Mclver soon experienced the virtuous circle of therapy: "The more I shared about myself, the better I felt. I was able to get to the heart of what I was battling with."

Mclver's mental health journey offered an epiphany for the almost 30-something. Suddenly, he was able to see decades-long patterns in his own life and in those of his siblings, and how those patterns had played out over time. As he began to find his footing, he became an evangelist of sorts, promoting mental health wellness. So, when a trusted friend posted an opportunity to volunteer with NAMI Metro Baltimore—helping to co-facilitate weekly peer support groups for Baltimoreans coping with mental illness—he jumped at the opportunity.

Mclver received training as a facilitator, and now helps run bi-weekly meetings. He's also the first to acknowledge that he has gained as much from these healing circles as he has given. "I have received a ton of support through those groups myself," he says. "It's so enlightening and eye-opening to see what individuals have overcome."

**“ NAMI HAS BEEN A
PILLAR FOR ME IN MY
OWN JOURNEY... ”**

We're hearing about the triumphs, hearing about the hardships that others have gone through. It's kept me humble."

In fact, Mclver observes just how often the group members offer each other assistance, advice, and support, catapulting forward someone else's progress. "The participants are really doing the work. There are times when they are literally bouncing ideas off of each other and the next thing you know, the time is up."

In those moments, he and his co-facilitator are quick to acknowledge that synergy for the group: "You guys just had the session amongst yourselves," he laughs. "We [facilitators] were just here!"

What continues to impress Mclver has been the wrap-around nature of supports that NAMI members can access. "There are all of these different avenues that really offer support and aid for individuals who are going through things: Someone to talk to, or a safe place to go."

And, of course, the peer-to-peer space, which has offered a critical addition to therapy.

"NAMI has been a pillar for me in my own journey," says Mclver. "My journey led me to where I am now, so I'm hopeful that, in this season of my life, I'll be able to start to give back and help other individuals who may have gone through similar things."

Anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges "don't have to be something that is going to be the nail in your coffin," Mclver says. "It could be a launchpad." —Maggie Master



Ricquel Griffin

ENDING THE SILENCE PARTNER

→ Ricquel Griffin understands that, sometimes, a bridge must be built between mental health providers and those affected by mental illness or traumatic stress. Griffin serves as Community Outreach Coordinator for Kennedy Krieger Institute's Center for Child and Family Traumatic Stress, which helps children and their families cope and recover from the effects of trauma and stress. In her role, much of the work is simply helping families know the wealth of resources that exist and helping them overcome the stigma associated with mental health conditions in children.

Deconstructing the harmful biases that exist around diagnosis and treatment of childhood mental health disorders requires partnership. Enter NAMI Metro Baltimore: Griffin's team at KKI has collaborated with NAMI to facilitate the organization's flagship

"Ending The Silence" programming, a series of presentations to identify the warning signs of mental health conditions in teens and highlight the steps to seek treatment. Griffin and her KKI clinicians speak as well, further demystifying the often opaque concept of treatment for attendees.

"We destigmatize therapy, versus what people may see on TV," Griffin says. Often, she notes, therapy is portrayed as one-size-fits-all, when, in fact, different mental health challenges mean different therapeutic objectives and modalities.

"Ending the Silence" also goes beyond the logistics to the personal: Each session is co-led by a young adult who has experienced a mental health diagnosis and treatment, sharing their personal journey of recovery. Such personal narratives can prove pivotal, providing families and teens the safe space to understand the process. Hearing from a peer can also break down archetypes about engaging in therapy or being labeled as someone with a mental health condition.

"Trauma therapy has a lot to do with rewriting your story," Griffin says. By telling that story on their terms, those teens become powerful spokespeople for mental health supports.

The overarching takeaway Griffin has observed through the "Ending the Silence" curriculum is one of empowerment—not simply in terms of accessing resources, but in helping teens understand who is in the driver's seat. "The biggest thing people begin to understand is that the client is the one who leads therapy, not the clinician," Griffin says.

Some sessions are delivered directly to students, but equally profound, says Griffin, has been the experience of hosting an "Ending the Silence" presentation for groups of parents, school-based counselors and educators. "People are trying to identify how to receive these services and how they can integrate them into schools."

Griffin strives to be an anchor for health services in her community. "My focus is to build and maintain relationships so parents and families are aware of the type of services we offer—to build that bridge."

In a recent presentation, Griffin had the opportunity to do just that: A mother of twins sought her out, wanting to know how to access these supports for her children. "We were able to be a resource for her," Griffin says, noting that even that small step of asking for help can feel like crossing a canyon as a parent.

"Parents aren't always ready to acknowledge what their children have experienced, to name the trauma occurred. But you allow your children to grow and flourish when you allow your children to heal," says Griffin.

It is, she notes, one critical step in breaking the cycle of generational trauma.

"Healed and healthy children become healed and healthy adults, who then go on to raise healed and healthy children," Griffin says. —Maggie Master



Richard Silberstein

CORPORATE PARTNER

→ Years ago, Richard Silberstein read an article highlighting the best places to work within his field. As the founder of SIG, an employee-benefits firm based in Baltimore, he saw that list as a challenge: Someday, he vowed, his company would be among those names.

To reach that goal, Silberstein has espoused a central theory of action: What is best for his employees is actually best for business. And so, Silberstein set out to create a positive and healthy culture. He saw himself as the “corporate dad,” in a way, hoping to support growth and development. Things seemed okay.

And then came the pandemic, overlaid by a racial reckoning in the United States.

“Suddenly, mental health was the number one thing we needed to support our clients and our employees with,” says Silberstein.

Seeking to arm his employees with that toolkit, he called NAMI Metro Baltimore, which had proven an invaluable resource in

the past. NAMI designed various optional sessions, inviting SIG’s team members to join and to talk about their own mental health journey.

Silberstein was among the first to sign up, hoping to model a level of vulnerability he knew such conversations would require.

“Part of what I’ve learned as a leader is to lean in to the uncomfortable conversations, to share your own experiences and allow your people to have a safe space.” Those sessions, Silberstein realized, “allowed our people to feel like it’s okay to not be okay. And it’s okay to talk about it.”

Silberstein and his senior leaders were able to better understand the myriad challenges happening for their team beyond the pandemic’s Zoom screens: Working parents juggling childcare and virtual school, or single employees dealing with isolation. In an emotional revelation, one Black employee shared that she prayed each day that her son, her brother, and her husband would all come home alive in a country that often harmed unarmed Black men.

“I never knew that,” he says. “It was part of her anxiety.”

Thanks to the team’s partnership with NAMI, says Silberstein, “We’ve come through

Covid even stronger than when we began. We are having honest, real conversations that allow people to share how they are doing, and how they can help others.”

Soon, and not surprisingly, SIG’s clients were saying: “We want that stuff, too.”

And so, NAMI has helped deliver sessions, facilitate discussions, participate in panels, or lead a client chat. “NAMI is going to help you be a lot more empathetic if you’re a leader,” says Silberstein. “There are CEOs and executives that should understand and experience NAMI—not just for their people, but as a participant. You can read about a mental health issue,” Silberstein says. “But the bottom line is NAMI has helped me realize what that really means.”

As example, Silberstein says that he is still reflecting on an experiential learning session, months later, that NAMI led about people experiencing auditory hallucinations as a result of their mental health condition. The group of participants engaged in an activity to understand just how debilitating that type of illness can be. Silberstein says it led to a powerful conversation about anxiety, depression, and negative thoughts. Suddenly he realized that, while negative thoughts or depression may be less crippling than something as encompassing as hallucinations or hearing voices, it still created a heavy backpack to bring to work.

“How can you concentrate on your job if this is what you’re dealing with?” Silberstein observes.

These discussions, he says, helped him explore what was happening in his own backyard instead of simply assuming his people were fine.

Now, thanks to partnerships like NAMI and Silberstein’s commitment to mental health and wellness, his employees do know—and they have the resources to promote their own mental health. And, in large part because of that type of culture, he can count his company as one of those best places to work. —Maggie Master



Gertie Wilson

FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP FACILITATOR

→ When Gertie Wilson's son was diagnosed with a brain disorder his senior year in college, the devoted mother suddenly felt like an outsider in a foreign land. She knew nothing about the signs of mental illness or what his specific diagnosis meant. She had no idea what to expect from his new medications—or even what side effects to look for. Wilson felt helpless.

But then, serendipity struck: She remembers glimpsing a blurb in her employee newsletter, noting that it was Mental Health Awareness Month. The notice offered resources, including a NAMI hotline. She picked up the phone and, as luck would have it, the woman she spoke with had experienced the very same journey with her own son.

"I remember hanging up the phone feeling relief," Wilson recalls. "One of the lessons I've found with NAMI is that you find out you are not alone."

The mom on the other end of the call—one of NAMI's trained hotline operators—encouraged Wilson to sign up for the organization's "Family-to-Family," a free, eight-session workshop for families of people with mental health conditions. The Baltimore-based course seeks to improve coping and problem-solving abilities for those closest to those with a mental health condition. Thirteen years later, Wilson remembers that first session as if it were yesterday: A few dozen participants—children, parents, friends, relatives—people from all walks of life, all going through the same thing she was.

"Walking out of that session, my daughter said that it looked like a load had been lifted off of me," Wilson says. "I wasn't alone."

But it wasn't just knowing she had a community, Wilson says. She left that program with tools. "By the end, I felt like I was empowered to handle my situation because I'd seen these great people who were doing it. I felt like they saved my life."

Wilson wanted to provide others with the same life raft she'd been given. A year after that first group meeting, she decided to volunteer. Since 2009, Wilson has helped

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facilitate NAMI Metro Baltimore's weekly support groups.

"A lot of times, if someone is coming to a support group, they're in crisis," Wilson says. "They're trying to figure out what's happening to their family member. My objective is to show them they're not alone. We will support you and we've got your back."

And so, like clockwork, each Thursday night, Wilson has been there, ready to receive Baltimoreans who are hoping to support their loved one and empower themselves. Some faces are familiar, weekly staples. Others come and go, returning during moments of crisis. Wilson says that a big part of the support group's appeal is the reassurance of knowing that the program will always be there, ready to receive someone in need.

"Attendees realize that someone else knows exactly what they're going through," Wilson says.

Thankfully, when the pandemic shuttered in-person operations, Wilson's group didn't skip a beat, moving to an online forum that enabled participants to still come and gain resources.

"I feel indebted to NAMI Metro Baltimore," says Wilson. "They were a part of what saved my life. I felt like I was in the middle of a desert and I didn't know where to go or who to call. And this chapter wound up being the resource to give me some stability to ground my feet."

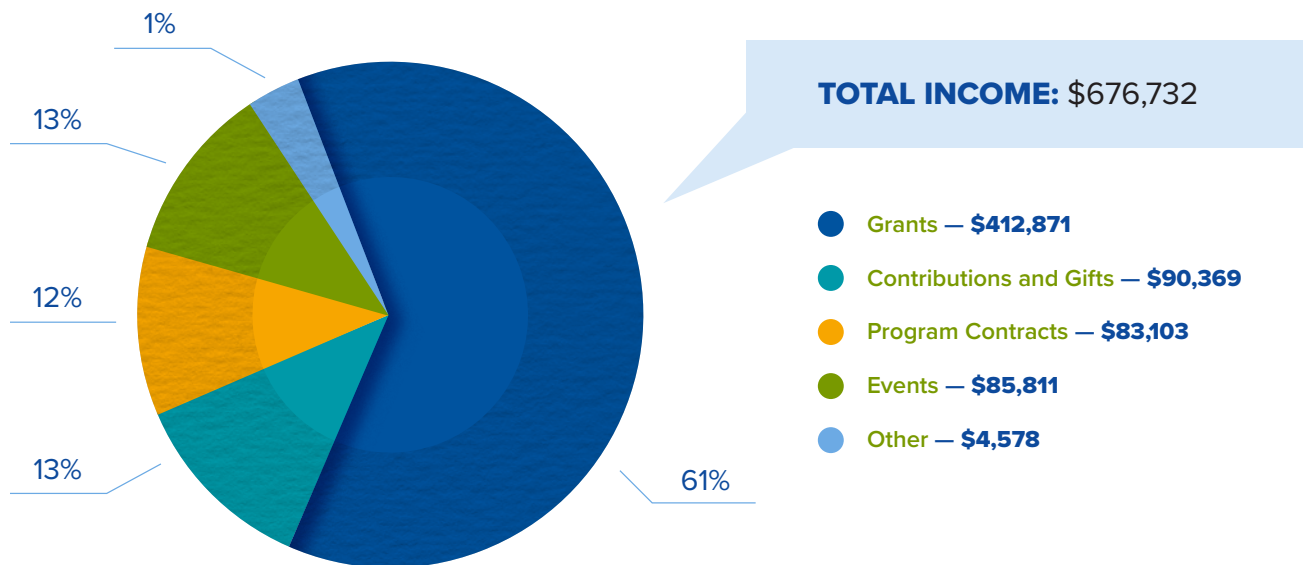
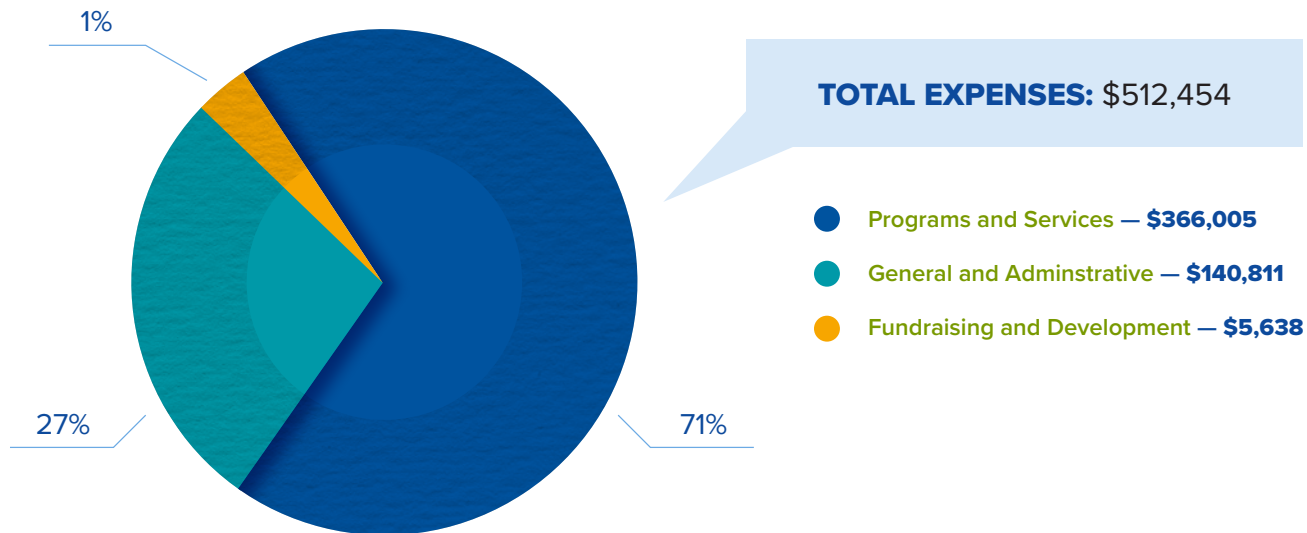
It also saved and strengthened Wilson's relationship with her son.

"For him to be handed this type of illness is remarkable," Wilson notes. "People don't understand what it's like. He's my hero."

—Maggie Master

FINANCIALS

The generous financial support of donors, charitable foundations, corporate and community partners enables NAMI Metropolitan Baltimore to provide all of our peer and family services at no cost to participants. We are dedicated to eliminating barriers and ensuring that anyone who needs NAMI's help has access to these life-changing resources.



Financial statements for the 2021 fiscal year are presented prior to audit review. Adjustments are anticipated. For additional financial information, please visit www.namibaltimore.org.

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