



National Alliance on Mental Illness

NAMI Santa Cruz County

Your generosity supported 12,000 people in the last 6 months!

Individuals and families facing despair and crisis in isolation found the resources and compassionate support they urgently needed. You helped to educate teens and parents, and reduced stigma so people seek help.



In October 2023, our new office in Watsonville opened to the public. **Community members can now drop in Monday-Friday** to receive resources, information, and support in a safe and inclusive environment.

You Helped Families Heal

Noeli Perez, our Associate Director, attended the graduation of our first in-person Familia-a-Familia class in Spanish. She recalls, “the way participants supported each other was truly inspiring. Throughout the session, they expressed their gratitude for the class with tears in their eyes. It was a magical and heartwarming experience.”



You Built Peer Connection

With your help, NAMISCC now has a support group for Spanish-speaking adults with mental health conditions - **NAMI Conexión**. In February, Conexión began to meet **in person** once per month, in addition to weekly zoom meetings.

Our Connection Support Group in English continues to meet 3 times per week and has robust participation. **Your generous support means that people navigating mental health conditions have acceptance, compassion, empowerment, and a place to belong.**



“Even in the dark times, I’m capable of holding onto hope. I am capable of living a life that is very rich and meaningful and fulfilling despite the challenges that living with a mental illness presents.”

- Serena*, age 20. See her story on pg 2

(*Name changed for privacy)



Hope. Inclusion. Empowerment. Compassion. Fairness

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Finding Hope in the Dark

Serena's mental health challenges began at the young age of 12, **"that was when I started experiencing what I now know was my first depressive episode. I didn't know it at the time. It wasn't something that was talked about in my family."**

She went from being a very social and outgoing child to isolating from friends and experiencing feelings of numbness, despair, and exhaustion. **"For me depression is this dark fog that makes everything feel really heavy, confusing, and hopeless,"** she shares.



Serena struggled silently through middle school and high school, until at 17 she started having daily panic attacks, stopped going to school, and began experiencing suicidal thoughts. At that time she started therapy and was diagnosed with major depression. She focused on healthy habits and things got better for a time.

"I realized that I need to get more help if I'm going to survive this."

When Serena started college, her health took a turn again. She wrestled with severe depression and constant suicidal thoughts. Finally, she recalls, **"I realized that I need to get more help if I'm going to survive this."**

She began seeing a psychiatrist and trying medication, but experienced alarming audio and visual hallucinations. **"I felt like I was living in a horror movie. I was in a really scary place."** In despair, she called her school's crisis hotline and, for the first time in her life, was completely honest about her symptoms. **"I told the counselor everything, all the things that I was so ashamed of that I was dealing with. She met me with so much compassion and kindness. That was a huge turning point for me."**

Serena was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, found a medication that works for her, and finally felt stability. **"I realized that I could be doing everything right, but there was this missing piece: I wasn't allowing myself to show up authentically, and show people what I was struggling with."**

She now focuses on cultivating authentic and unconditional relationships, and says, **"NAMI has been so helpful for me because it's a place where I can just show up as I am and experience community, connection, and shared vulnerability."**

Through NAMISCC she also supports peers and visits local middle and high schools to share her mental health story with teens. She says this is the kind of support that she needed as a teenager, but didn't have, **"no one was really talking about it and I felt so alone in my struggles."** Now she works to let other young people know they are not alone.

Serena is excelling in her education and plans to be a therapist. She knows that her mental health will wax and wane, **"It's a never ending journey, but I'm taking it one day at a time."** The next leg of the journey she intends to take on with hope, self-compassion, and a strong community around her. Because of your care and support, NAMISCC will be right there with her.

Help more people like Serena today: www.namisc.org/donate

Questions? Contact Danu Schoeck at danu@namisc.org / (831) 200-4037

