

Ames community advocates for mental health at NAMI Walk

William Dotterweich, Politics Reporter

Content warning: This article speaks on mental health and suicide. If you or someone you love is struggling with mental health, please reach out for help.

Over 100 people registered for Saturday's Central Iowa National Alliance on Mental Health's Walk at North Grand Mall.

NAMIWalks is a series of events by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, NAMI, to fundraise and bring awareness to mental health programs and services for those in need. The goal of NAMIWalks is to achieve "mental health for all." Anyone can participate in the walks, whether you're walking for yourself or someone you love.

Joshua Ginn, who found a support group through NAMI, participated with his friends to advocate the struggles and stigma of mental health.

"People need inclusion and support, and we're here to support one another," Ginn said. "People who are suffering from mental illness can be strong and still have feelings and can add great contributions to society. People need to care about others to bring value into life."

Many volunteered to help with the event and NAMI On Campus, a student organization that aims to address mental health issues at Iowa State by providing resources to students and educating the community about mental health.

Ashlee Danner, vice president of NAMI On Campus and a junior studying English, said the resources that NAMI provides are a great first step in getting help for mental struggles.

"I feel like a lot of students hide their mental struggles because they just assume that it's normal, and I think the first step to get yourself out there is trying counseling or therapy," Danner said. "Just trying to recognize that sometimes you're not okay and that it is okay to get help and seek out resources with groups like NAMI."

Also participating was Laura Camerona, owner and founder of Words Worth Repeating, a service that creates customized books for children based on situations that children are too young to understand, such as mental health, grief and family issues.

"Mental health is really interesting because people think of it as a mental illness, but mental health is no different than physical health," Camerona said. "There are little things like daily habits that we can do to help our brains and our mental health just like we do our bodies."



NAMI on Campus

Members of NAMI on Campus pose for a photo with stress relief coloring pages.

Cameron said being yourself online and in person is a great way to break up the stigma of mental health, as well as teaching children at a young age that mental health is okay to talk about.

"There is so much we can do to end the stigma, such as being honest and showing their real selves on social media and in person, and starting with kids when they're little to talk about mental health like we do anything else and teach them ways to feel good about themselves and when they're adults, they'll be okay talking about mental health," Cameron said.

Resources, support groups and more information about NAMI and NAMIWalks can be found on their website.

If you are struggling with mental illness or in need of mental health assistance, you are not alone.

You may call or text the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 988, contact Student Counseling Services at 515-294-5056 or visit their website.