



## North Alabama Mental Health Coalition

November 12, 2024

### **Attendees (in person):**

Daniel Adamek (Little Orange Fish)	Sarah Bailey (UAH RAN)	Kim Bigelow (Warrior Wellness Program)
Annie Brasseale (VOP)	Richard Browning (CID)	Darlene Burton (Salvation Army)
Melissa Caldwell (Wellstone)	Rudolfo Chavez (SVDP)	Emily Colbert (Wellstone)
Gina Cushing (Our Place)	Akeem Davis (Huntsville Hospital)	Catherine DeCanal (National CAC)
Jennifer Gentry (Long Leaf Centers)	Amy Gillott (Decatur West)	Kelly Goff (ADMH)
Tammy Goodwin (ALNG)	Dawn Hannon (Wellstone)	Traci Harris (Elm Foundation)
Jessica Hays (Huntsville Hospital)	Kim Holder (Not One More Alabama)	Suzanne Katschke (NAMI)
Kimberly Lamar (Drug Free Partnership)	Kati Lang (Amedisys Home Health)	Cheryl McClendon (Wellstone/WES)
Laurin Mitchell (Wellstone)	Krista Moulton (Therapist)	Kelli Mukaddam (NCAC)
Letricia Ogutu (Wellstone)	Julie Schenck-Brown (Huntsville Police)	Chief Dustin Spires (Madison Fire)
Jenny Stang (Alabama Lifespan Respite)	Paula Steele (Wellstone/WES)	Lakebra Walker (Alliance Health)
Don Webster (HEMSI)	Mack Yates (SVDP/VOP)	Lorenzo Young (ROSS Recovery)
Sharon Weldy		

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Introductions are important because you need to find out who to help you

### **National Child Advocacy Center (NCAC) Abuse Prevention – Catherine De Canal**

Catherine is from the prevention area of NCAC. They have been offering child sexual abuse prevention training (Darkness to Light: Stewards of Children) since 2017 and have trained over 5000 adults. Stewards of Child is the most gripping training program many have ever attended. This program is different because it includes scenario based learning and real-life situations. The main objective of the training is to empower adults to prevent, recognize and respond to child sexual abuse.

Catherine showed a brief video of the introduction to Stewards of Children which showed what adults can do to prevent child sexual abuse. The idea is to recognize your sphere of influence. They offer the training to any Alabama adult at no cost either in person or virtually. They can even go out to an organization if requested. The training takes about 2 ½ hours (social workers receive 2.5 CE hours) and provides useful information for any adult that cares about the safety of children.

Kelli Mukaddam is from the intervention department of NCAC. They handle a situation once sexual abuse has been reported and they step in, interview the child, do a physical exam, and then they connect the child to an advocate which will help with the resources they need. They try and make it as friendly as possible.

They also offer trauma therapy, not just for sexual abuse, but for any form of abuse or neglect. Trauma can be crime related. All services are at no cost to the family.

Mack asked what is the path they follow if parents come to the center and they are a drug abuser or have a mental illness. Kelli mentioned that they try to work with the entire family. They make sure that the child is taken care of and that the adults are getting treatment as well. They have a program with the Department of Justice called the Cares Team which deals with children whose parents have a substance abuse disorder. They work with the entire family making sure everybody gets treatment and they try to keep them together. They can provide extra support for the family and connect them to free resources or work within their income.

Unfortunately, they have a therapy wait list (there are only 4 trauma therapists). If a family has insurance, they try to help them find private care.

Mack also asked where a child goes if the family is in crisis. Kelli said that it depends on the situation, but they try to keep child with family if at all possible. They can place a child in foster care as a last result.

Mack asked if there was cooperation with parents, especially if one has issues and the other does not. Kelli said it varies. Sometimes parents in shock, angry or disbelief and they work with the families where they are. They have to educate the families on how abuse works and that the child will not be afraid of the abuser because the abuser has gained the child's trust.

They have a care giver support group that meets twice a year. They work with physical abuse and neglect as well.

A question was asked about how they judge if a person is safe again for the child to return to the home. DHR does that. DHR also has a Partnership and parenting class (one on one).

Abuse cases are difficult to prosecute. Call the police. They don't want people to confront an alleged offender. Report it to the police.

Someone brought up a situation where a child was being groomed and asked what you can do about a situation like that. Kelli mentioned they get calls like this all the time. She said you need to call the police and they will usually respond very quickly. They don't want you to confront the alleged offender; they would rather work behind the scenes so they can obtain all of the required evidence. The NCAC has good connections with the police, so if you are worried about the safety of a child, you can call NCAC at any time. Sometimes the process seems slow, but they have to follow the law.

A question was raised about how would you would instruct a family on keeping their kids safe. NCAC has tool kits on how to keep children safe. There are lots of resources online, but families are welcome to call NCAC any time if they have concerns. So much depends on the specific situation and being there and being supportive is really important.

Someone brought up that in our current environment, sometimes prevention is made more difficult by accusations by some communities that are *not* safe and they are, or that they *are* safe and people say they are not. Are there resources that combat incorrect information that some groups are safe and others are not? Catherine suggested that the "*Darkness to Light*" website which provides lots of good resources. It is important to have those conversations with your children. Adults should never ask a child to keep a secret. "*Hot Chocolate Talk*" is another good resource. NCAC does a program in the schools called SCAN (Stop Child Abuse and Neglect) at different ages.

### **NAMI – Suzanne Katschke**

Suzanne has a long history of dealing with a family member with mental illness who ultimately died.

She was a school teacher for 10 years and noticed that younger and younger children are struggling with mental illness. She got involved with NAMI Huntsville and wanted to start a Madison chapter. NAMI (National Alliance of Mental Illness) has a mission to improve the lives of the people dealing with mental and their families. It is the largest grass roots program in the US. She contacted NAMI Alabama and started going through the steps to start a chapter in Madison.

NAMI Huntsville dissolved, so now the largest metro community in the state doesn't have a NAMI. Suzanne met with Judge Barger and they decided to start a NAMI Madison County. NAMI provides support, education, and awareness. [www.NAMI.org](http://www.NAMI.org) is the website. The services at NAMI are provided at no cost.

NAMI can do:

1. Support groups
2. Great programs including:
  - NAMI basics (6-week course for people with children under 22 struggling with mental health issues)
  - Ending the Silence (for middle schoolers)
  - Family to Family (educates families dealing with mental health issues)
  - NAMI Friends and Family (seminar for those who don't have time for a long course)
  - Hearts and Minds
  - NAMI Homefront (for military)
  - In Our Own Voice (for those who are diagnosed to tell the story of their journey)
  - Peer to Peer
  - NAMI Providers
  - NAMI Sharing Hope (helping people in the ethnic populations)
  - NAMI Faith Net (churches can be safe places to help support families)

The plan is to try to launch NAMI Madison County in 2025. There will be 2 locations: one in Huntsville and one in Madison.

How can you help? NAMI needs people to serve on the board (about 6 people who are passionate about mental health). They need people to lead groups. They are also interested in doing things that raise awareness about mental health (such as walks). Suzanne feels like there is so much potential and there are so many people that suffer in silence.

You can contact **Suzanne Katschke**: [suzanne@yourheritagechurch.com](mailto:suzanne@yourheritagechurch.com) Phone # (256)797-1914

### **January 2025 – Mack Yates**

Mack is going to become an Advocate at Large, so that he can have more time to visit people and organizations all over north Alabama.

Beginning in January, Daniel Adamek and Krista Moulton will assist Mack with NAMHC meetings. Everything will be the same; however, Mack will be focusing on getting the word out instead of planning the meetings.

Daniel wanted to make sure that everyone knows that there is a lot of good information on the website. The minutes of the coalition meetings are posted on the website every month. Daniel showed the website and explained that we now have a NAMHC GPT that will answer any questions about the coalition (you have to be signed into your Chat GPT account).

*Next Meeting*  
*Tuesday January 14, 2024*  
*11:00 am at Wellstone*  
*(No meeting in December)*