

(con't from page 3) also important to seek support from other families who are dealing with similar problems. This subset of families in the local NAMI affiliate may find it beneficial to meet separately at times to provide support in a way best done by other people who also have the problem. Families may want to investigate their local Al-Anon and/or Narcotics Anonymous (NA) groups. These support groups have proven to be immensely helpful to some families. Finally, families should realize they cannot stop their relative's substance abuse. They can, however, avoid covering it up or doing things that make it easy for the person to continue the denial. Families can learn what they can do about the problem, but they must be realistic that much of it is out of their hands. With great effort, some of the painful emotions will subside, members will feel more serene, and life can be worthwhile again.

For more info, contact: National Alliance for the Mentally Ill
Colonial Place Three 2107 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300 Arlington, VA
22201-3042 Business Telephone: 703/524-7600 Toll-Free HelpLine
1-800-950-NAMI

Report on Consumer Advocacy

by Debbie Wilson

I'm a client of Heritage Housing, a resident in Supported Housing. I've been a client for quite a number of years. On the weekend of May 31st 2002, I attended along with Herbert Ward and Ruth Acevedo, an intensive 2-day Peer Educational Training workshop developed and sponsored by NAMI NYS. In that 2-days, we learned how to present a nine week program. There are other teams throughout New York State; however, our team is the only presenting team in the Harlem and Washington Heights area. After these nine weeks are over, we will regroup and present a second program, in 2003.

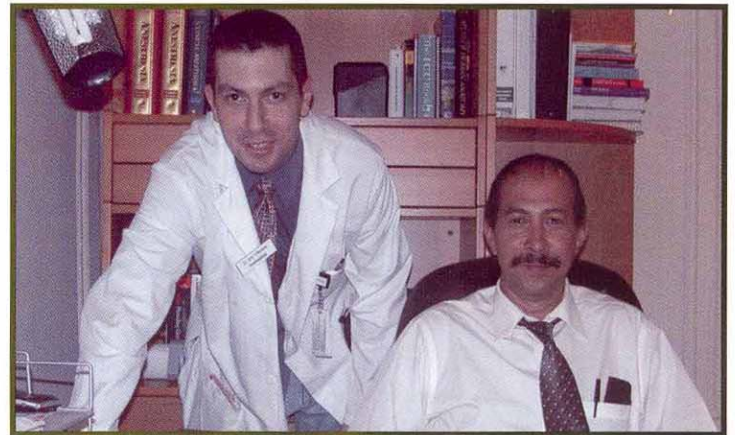
Our presentation, based on the workshop, started on September 5th. It ran from September 5 through November 7th. During the training program, various aspects of a person's mental health are discussed, and each week a different subject is discussed. For example, definition of mental illness diagnoses and how they affect one, and the myths about mental illness.

Our presentations are made at Harlem House Psychosocial Club, and they are directed by Mr. Sigfrido Benitez, Harlem House's Activities Therapist. Presentations include information on various features of a consumer's life. For example, how to make a hospital stay more endurable, whether for a mental or physical illness. Other subjects include spirituality and the religious practices of different religions.

Along with my duties at the NAMI-NYS initiative, I am a consumer representative for the Health and Hospitals Consumer (HHC) Affairs Office of Behavioral Health, coordinated by Elmer Vasquez. I am Co-secretary of the Upper Manhattan Mental Health Council's Consumer Committee, and Consumer Co-chairperson of the Northern Manhattan Mental Health Council. The object of HHC and the Upper Manhattan Consumer Committee is to inform and empower consumers. The committees present and discuss ways for consumers to participate in their own recovery; to help consumers navigate the difficult mental health bureaucracy, enabling them to help themselves.

(The Upper Manhattan Mental Health Consumer Committee is under the umbrella of the New York City Federation for Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Alcoholism Services.)

Staff Development



Oswaldo Villafane, Case Manager

Oswaldo Villafane has compounded reasons to be proud these days. He has passed the Written Examination [the first time around] toward becoming a Credentialed Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Counselor (CASAC). Certification is provided by the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. The next step in the credentialing process is his participation in the Case Presentation Method (CPM) oral examination, which he will take in May. He is noticeably moving closer toward his educational goal of obtaining a Masters Degree in Public Administration.

Another source of great pride – and no doubt there are many others – is that his son Eric is a practicing anesthesiologist at New York Presbyterian Hospital. Dr Eric Villafane is a graduate of the University of Florida; fulfilled his internship at Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx, and completed his residency in anesthesiology at the New York-Presbyterian Hospital in New York.