

**NAMI Sarasota and Manatee Counties, Inc.**  
**Journey to Mental Wellness**

NAMI Sarasota and Manatee Counties' mission, to improve the lives of individuals, families, and caregivers on their journey to mental wellness, is brought to life every day in its "You Are Not Alone" (YANA) wellness drop-in centers. The proposed ***Journey to Mental Wellness*** initiative will allow more individuals to benefit from YANA's peer support services by addressing transportation barriers that prevent many community members living with mental illness from attending.

The total initiative budget of \$109,500 will fund the purchase of a 15-passenger van for \$59,467, the hiring of a part-time driver at \$24,000 for one year, plus marketing and ride-share partnership costs for eighteen months.

YANA centers in Venice and Sarasota offer structured support groups and communal activities in a safe, inclusive, non-clinical setting. All residents of Sarasota and Manatee Counties with mental illness are welcome. There are no fees or referrals required. Staff are certified peer support counselors. Transportation is the main barrier to participation for many. The van program would serve low-income individuals in Manatee and southern Sarasota Counties without transportation options or unable to use public transit. The rideshare program would help members overcome temporary transportation difficulties using Uber, Breeze bus, and other services to maintain attendance while resolving transportation issues.

With the transportation program in place, NAMI projects that it will increase visits to its YANA Centers from 7,000 to 8,500 each year, a 21% increase. Peer support services are an essential element of mental health recovery. These services have been shown to reduce depression, improve physical health, and help individuals take an active role in their own recovery with the support and guidance of people who have been through the same recovery process themselves. The van could also be utilized to support initiatives currently in development, such as the proposed plan to offer satellite services at Manatee County public libraries. The Centers have recently been designated as Resiliency Centers by the American Red Cross, and the van will be useful for transporting both goods and people during an emergency response.

NAMI intends to pursue grants, corporate and individual donations, and partnerships with local businesses and philanthropic organizations to sustain and expand the program beyond the initiative and has proven success doing so with other programs.

By bridging the transportation barrier for individuals who are otherwise isolated, this initiative will ensure they receive the vital peer support necessary to empower their mental health journey.