

## WORKING WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITIES AND YOUTH TO COMBAT STIGMA

by Janet Susin

This Spring we participated in events sponsored by the **Theta Iota Omega Chapter of AKA (Alpha Kappa Alpha)**, an African American women's sorority committed to social action and social service. It has been a pleasure to work with these gracious and dedicated women.

On April 9<sup>th</sup> the AKA's hosted a well-attended presentation on **Mental Illness and Stigma** at the Roosevelt Library. Along with Hakeem Rahim, our dynamic *Let's Talk Mental Illness* presenter, I had the pleasure of sharing my personal story and what we're doing in schools to educate young people about mental illness through our *Breaking the Silence* lessons for upper elementary, middle, and high school students.

Although a competing event kept AKA from participating in this year's **NAMIWalks Long Island/Queens** at Jones Beach on May 7th, we were happy to have them as a NAMIWalks Sponsor. They also generously contributed granola bars for our walkers.

On Saturday, July 11<sup>th</sup> we tabled at the AKA's **Family Fitness Fun and Health Day BBQ**. It was a pleasure to have the opportunity to promote NAMI-Queens/Nassau and join in the fun at the Arthur Mackey Park in Roosevelt. (pictures)

Our connection with the African American community also extends to the faith community. We are fortunate to have a longstanding connection with the **Greater Allen AME Cathedral of New York** in Jamaica, Queens and have been running Family-to-Family classes there for years. The most recent graduates are pictured below. (picture)

For once we didn't have to worry about having enough water at our NAMIWalks on May 7th. **Who is Hussain?.org** donated 2,000 bottles of Poland Spring water and brought a large team of supporters to the walk to give it out. This international non-profit aims to inspire people through the example of Hussain, a 7<sup>th</sup> century leader, who made the ultimate sacrifice for social justice and was committed to bringing positive change to the world. We were very grateful for their generosity and the spirit that they brought to our walk. (pictures)

Once again **Port Washington Weber Middle School and Schreiber High School** students were one of our largest walk teams. Their team, **Port Voices**, was also one of our biggest fundraisers raising a very impressive \$9,477. Linda Manzo, Social Studies teacher at Schreiber and Dept. Chair, has done an incredible job over the years in engaging young people in our cause. Way to go, Linda! (pictures)

**The Manhasset High School Art Honor Society** raised \$1,100 for NAMIWalks at their Create for a Cause art fair in May. Organized by Manhasset art teacher, Myrna Schein, young artists had a wonderful time decorating cupcakes, making jewelry and art objects and having their faces painted or getting temporary tattoos.

During the past three years thanks to foundation grant support **Hakeem Rahim** has reached 11,658 students in 68 middle schools and high schools with **NAMI Queens/Nassau's Let Talk Mental Illness (LTMI)**. If we include non-grant funded schools Hakeem has reached over 20,000 students with this presentation. In the Spring, thanks to a grant from the Greentree Foundation, he spoke to another 10 schools on Long Island. We look forward to reporting how many students were reached in the near future.