

Memories from Greg Barber

I wrote this to a Manhasset resident, but decided to send it to a few Manhasset supporters of mine.

We met at a networking lunch on Long Island. I used to live on Kensett Road in Manhasset. My son was a lacrosse star there. He became mentally ill with schizophrenia starting in his Junior year. Life changed for everyone.

But I started a charity in my son's name., Neil Barber, with Hall of Fame lacrosse player and Manhasset coach, Bob Rule. The charity is www.neilswheelsny.com.

I made my son into a hero in Manhasset for raising food and for destigmatizing mental illness. We have raised over 70,000 cans and boxes of food in eight years. We started in 2009. My website has all the info on how and why we began, but this is a story about battling back from the depths of despair, and not about how many goals he made in lacrosse at Manhasset, where he was a star.

I once made a speech at the Swan Club before the annual NAMI Walks at Jones Beach and I didn't talk about Neil. I said I wanted all the team captains of this walk to stand up, and give all 230 people there a round of applause. For being a caregiver to a mentally ill family member is the toughest role in life. The applause went on a good two minutes.

I am not sure why I decided to write all of this to you, but I think it was because you live in Manhasset and holidays are really tough for me, and memories keep me going. It has been 25 years since Neil became ill. He had it all and then it was gone.

But, Neil is remembered by his classmates and friends in Manhasset because of our charity, and I feel his life is not in vain.

Thanks for inspiring my letter to you. It helps to open up.

Greg Barber & Neil Barber

North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center's 'Project Access'...

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According to Project Access results, almost half the participants said it was more difficult to find help for mental health or substance abuse

problems than care for physical ailments, 40 and two-thirds said their insurance company was not helpful in finding a mental health care provider.

State senators Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach) and Elaine Phillips (R-Flower Hill) provided a bipartisan front from the state Legislature, both sharing stories of family members who suffered from mental health issues and struggled to receive help.

"The founder of the Nassau-Queens National Alliance on Mental Illness chapter was my cousin Arnold Gould, who passed away last year," Kaminsky said. "He devoted his life to this issue, and for a long time, Arnold had a son who was the cousin in my family no one talked about or knew existed. We have to turn the page on that. We can do better."

Kaminsky and Phillips both said they would write letters to Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the state Department of Financial Services with the Project Access data and their concerns about the issue.

"I am extremely proud to be supporting Project Access and to be supporting the mental health industry because it is going to take research like this when we do write the governor and the New York State Department of Financial Services," Phillips said. "We have data behind it to say that this isn't happening in low socioeconomic areas of one part of the state; this is a rampant problem that is happening throughout New York and especially here on Long Island."

Phillips also said if needed she would support legislation to make mental health care more accessible and affordable across New York.

North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center partnered with LIU Post for the research, and social work professor Elissa Giffords said the school received approval from their institutional review board before administering the survey to human subjects and placed surveys in waiting rooms and posted flyers with a link to the survey as well.

"People who completed the survey, it's likely they already accessed care," Giffords said. "This is quite important, particularly because although they could access treatment, they still reported impediments when seeking this care. This also means there's a

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gave
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NYS Senators Elaine Phillips and Todd Kaminsky with Andrew Malekoff, Executive Director, NSC&FGC

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