

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) -- Agency Assessment**

NaRayel K. Daniels

Longwood University

SOWK 302: Human Behavior in the Macro Social Environment

Professor Daniels

April 19, 2021

### **Abstract**

This agency assessments provides an in-depth review of the NAMI Blue Ridge in Charlottesville, Virginia and the NAMI agency as a whole. Firstly, the writer focuses on discussing the agency's mission and values. Next, the writer focuses on a discussion of the organizational culture which then is followed by a discussion of the management and leadership styles of the organization. The assessment then addresses how the agency communicates internally and externally. Also, there is a discussion about how diversity is among the organization. Lastly, the writer ends the assessment by discussing policy changes and talking through their collaborations with smaller agencies like Region Ten.

*Keywords:* NAMI Blue Ridge, NAMI, organizational culture, diversity, leadership styles, management styles, policy changes, communication, collaboration

### **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) -- Agency Assessment**

NAMI is the National Alliance on Mental Illness. It is one of the nation's largest grassroots mental health organizations dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. An extension of NAMI is the NAMI Blue Ridge in Charlottesville, Virginia. This agency covers Albemarle, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa, Madison and Nelson counties. NAMI agency is known for the protection and advocacy for individuals with mental illnesses. This agency has over 600 NAMI state organizations and affiliates across the country that cover an array of free support and education programs (NAMI Blue Ridge, n.d.). NAMI's values include hope, inclusion, empowerment, compassion, and fairness. The NAMI Blue Ridge agency's mission is "Our mission is to promote recovery and improve the quality of life of Virginians with serious mental illness through support, education, and advocacy. We envision a future where all people affected by mental illness get the hope, help, and support that they need. NAMI Blue Ridge Charlottesville is an inviting, supportive platform for families and friends of those coping with a brain disorder. It offers programs that extend support, resources, advocacy, education and community services to families in the Charlottesville Blue Ridge area," (NAMI Blue Ridge, n.d.) This organization's mission focuses on support, education, and advocacy to improve quality of life for Virginians facing mental illnesses.

"Support" is defined as, "to promote the interests or cause of," (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) This agency has NAMI support programs for caregivers, community programs for loved ones in transition, and supports for low income and relief housing for the Charlottesville area.

“Education” is defined as, “the knowledge and development resulting from the process of being educated,” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) When discussing education, the agency focuses on providing information about mental health in America. “Advocacy” is defined as, “the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal,” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) When it comes to advocacy within this organization, they want to do more with the Virginia legislature. This includes establishing new policy, appealing to the general assembly, and more advocacy tools. The agency has also placed agencies devoted to advocacy treatment centers.

Within the NAMI Agency, Assistant Director, Sarah Wilson was interviewed to explore the agency’s culture, management, leadership styles, communication, diversity within the agency and clients, while also discussing different policy changes that have recently affected the agency.

According to the text, organizational culture is defined as, “the set of key values, beliefs, understandings, and norms shared by members of an organization,” (Kirst-Ashman, 2019). To fully understand organizational culture, it is important to know that it identifies the proper way to behave in an organization. When Sarah talked about the culture of the agency, she mentions that they recently had a leadership change in the middle of the pandemic. She believes that culture is impacted by the head of the organization. She mentions having a lot of anatomy but still looking towards the leader like a professor to let them know what the norms are, what the status quo is, and what things should look like. She emphasizes that they are still refining based on her values but in general they have a Klan culture, in reference to constantly supporting one another. Their

culture involves being supportive, engaging, and making sure people feel valued in being a part of their organization.

Sarah describes the management style as a visionary management style because they have such a big mission. Visionary management styles allow for the agency to focus on conveying the overall vision of the company to their team. This agency focuses on small team accountability and trust. She also mentions that because their mission surrounds mental health, they are constantly trying to empower and build resiliency throughout the workers. And she says they work to constantly recognize where they could grow and learn in aspects of their work. This style of management avoids authoritarian styles because within that style, one person is always making all the decisions and there is this unquestioned obedience. One advantage of this management style is that it helps to motivate all the workers to work towards common goals. One disadvantage of this management style is that you can lose the focus on the details which may lead to problems in the future. Their director's leadership style is democratic leadership. This leadership type "maximizes member input and participation," (Kirst-Ashman, 2019). In addition, Sarah is the assistant director, so she encourages open discussion for issues to allow for a wide range of knowledge to be shared.

With any agency, communication is an essential part of a successful organization. In an agency there are numerous channels of communication that staff members convey and receive information (Kirst-Ashman, 2019). Communication is "the process of transmitting information from one person or place to another," (Kirst-Ashman, 2019). When Sarah talks about barriers of

communication and channels of communication, she references both internally with staff and externally with stakeholders. Internally, Sarah believes that communication is essential in order to understand the game plan and playbook as she referenced. Recently due to the pandemic, the agency has been reliant on remote work and so she says that it is more important to have good communication so that you can effectively articulate yourself through emails because sometimes they can be easily misread and misconstrued. They really focus on trying to constantly communicate when things are happening, if they are being completed, and where they are in projects. Sarah expresses wanting a better project management system in place because virtually it has been a bit challenging, but they do well. They are such a small team, so she is grateful for that and they manage that through shared documents. Externally, the agency communicates with stakeholders through emails, social media channels, and websites especially during the time of the pandemic. She does believe that there are areas to grow. She discussed a little about the communication dynamics and they mostly use email, phone calls, text messaging, and zoom to communicate. Again, she believes in keeping everyone in the loop on where the projects are currently so that if they need reviews, approvals, or anything then everyone is on the right page.

Within an agency, diversity allows for a stronger organization because it plays a part in maintaining the core values, social mobility, raising quality of public services, and improving policy. Sarah mentions that throughout their bylaws, employee handbooks, and governing documents they discuss their commitment to diversity and inclusion. She emphasizes that in addition to their message, that everyone is impacted by mental health and she believes everyone

is worth serving throughout the community. She discusses that like many other organizations, they need to continue to put in the work and make sure they are engaging with diverse communities, are being knowledgeable about diverse communities, and providing welcoming support. In addition, she mentions that diversity is well reflected in their leadership, board members, and in their programming. Again, she believes that they have a lot of work to do but they are continuously working on it.

One policy change that Sarah stated has been a great effect and experience on the agency was going remote. She mentions that it has been a tough year to think about policy changes and it has been a wild year to pivot change and be responsive to the pandemic. She discusses how liberating it has felt for the staff to go remote because it helps to manage their time, flow, and energy. Moving forward they plan on keeping the hybrid approach so it allows the workers to focus their energy on different environments and she believes that that can help tackle the bigger projects. She does not take the time to further discuss what policy changes are still needed.

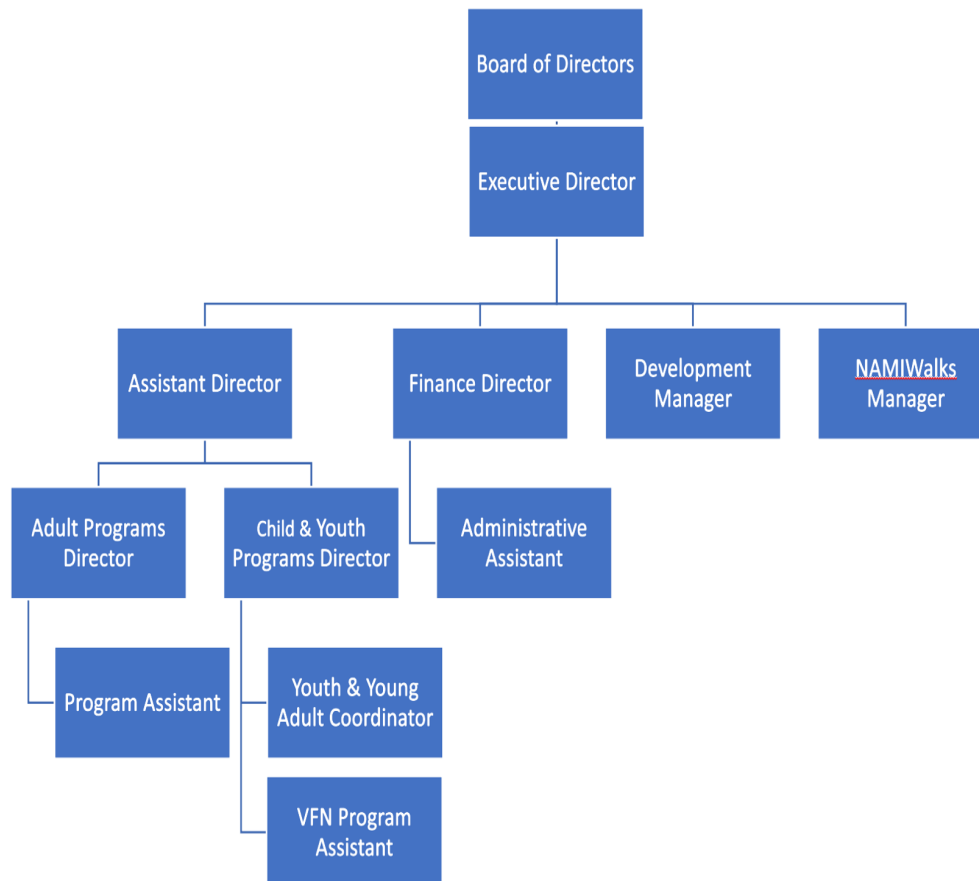
When asked about the collaborations with other agencies, Sarah mentions that this agency focuses on the macro side of social work and so, they focus on connecting and building knowledge and collaboration around a public health issue or need opposed to providing a direct service one on one. She discusses that all partnerships are geared towards helping to create more opportunities for individuals and families to be successful when managing their mental health or supporting a loved one with their mental health. They want to focus on raising awareness so people can recognize signs and symptoms early. She believes having more partners from

different positions allows them to reach more people. These partner agencies look like Region Ten, The Haven, The Crossings, and a few more.

### **Discussion**

In conclusion, the NAMI Agency has many elements that make up their organization. Their mission stems around being a support, advocating, and providing education on mental awareness and mental illness. Within their culture, it is clear that they rely on being supportive and transparent so that they can effectively collaborate with one another. In all, they seem to have a few issues they have to work on but that is bound to happen within any agency or organization. Overall, this agency has a well-working system and provides the necessary platform that is both inviting and supportive to families and friends.





## References

Kirst-Ashman, K. K., & Hull, G. H. (2019). *Human behavior in the macro social environment: an empowerment approach to understanding communities, organizations, and groups*. Boston, MA: Cengage.

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Support. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved April 12, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/support>

NAMI Blue Ridge. (n.d.). [www.namiblueridgecharlottesville.org](http://www.namiblueridgecharlottesville.org). Retrieved April 12, 2021, from <http://www.namiblueridgecharlottesville.org/>