

MORE THAN medicine

By Waechter Consulting Group



Greater San Antonio

Meet Lauren Byrd

I'm so excited to catch up with one of our most unique clients, the National Association on Mental Illness (NAMI) Greater San Antonio chapter. Lauren Byrd is a dear friend and the Executive Director of NAMI Greater San Antonio.

Thanks for taking the time to visit with me today Lauren. I can't wait to dig in and learn more about NAMI and the work you're doing in our community.

Let's start at the beginning, **what does NAMI Greater San Antonio do?**

We are a beacon of hope for individuals and families affected by mental illness, providing free mental health education, peer-led support groups, and community resources. Our programs serve people across Bexar, Wilson, Medina, Kendall, Comal, Bandera, and Atascosa Counties, and everything we do is centered on one core belief: no one should have to navigate mental illness alone.

That is a big geography! **What inspired the NAMI mission and how long has it served the community?**

NAMI Greater San Antonio has been serving this community for over 40 years. The organization was built on the belief that mental health care should be approachable, that support should be human, and that hope should always be accessible. The mission was inspired by families and individuals who found themselves without adequate support, information, or understanding — and who came together to change that. Today, that same spirit drives everything we do: advocacy, education, support, and public awareness for all those impacted by mental health challenges.

Now, more than ever, mental health resources are in such high demand in our community. How did you connect with NAMI and how does it align with your purpose?

My connection to NAMI flows naturally from a lifetime of service. After more than 20 years on active duty in the Air Force as a healthcare executive, I developed a deep appreciation for the intersection of physical and mental health — and how inseparable the two truly are. You cannot care for the whole person while ignoring either one.

When I transitioned out of the military, I carried with me a servant's heart shaped by decades of leading with mission and purpose at the forefront. San Antonio isn't just where I landed — it's the community I've chosen to call home, and I felt a genuine calling to pour back into it. NAMI Greater San Antonio gave me that opportunity. The mission of breaking down barriers, reducing stigma, and ensuring that every person has access to mental health support aligns perfectly with everything I've devoted my career and my life to. Serving here isn't a second chapter — it's a continuation of the same story.

It must be so fulfilling to see the impact that NAMI is able to achieve. **What do you think makes NAMI unique?**

What truly sets NAMI Greater San Antonio apart is that everything we do is rooted in lived experience. Our programs are taught and led by people who have personally navigated mental illness — either themselves or as caregivers. That means when someone walks into one of our support groups or calls our NAMI Bexar Warm Line, they're not just getting information; they're connecting with someone who truly understands. Add to that the fact that all of our programs are completely free, and you have an organization that removes every barrier it possibly can between people and the help they deserve.

What is one of the most rewarding things you've experienced with NAMI so far?

One of the most rewarding moments has been witnessing someone walk into one of our programs feeling isolated and hopeless, and watching them leave knowing they are not alone. Whether it's a family member who finally has the language to understand what their loved one is going through, or an individual who finds their footing through NAMI Peer-to-Peer, those transformations never get old. Hearing someone say, "I didn't know this existed — I wish I had found it sooner," is a powerful reminder of why this work matters.

That is SO powerful! And reinforcement that we need to bring more awareness of NAMI's resources to this area. **What's one thing most people might not know about you?**

Most people might not know that I am an introvert. I spend most of my days talking with people, making presentations or being in large groups and at the end of most days I am completely wiped out. It's really important for me to be able to spend some time in solitude so that I can recharge. I think that surprise often opens up a great conversation about how mental health touches every kind of person, regardless of background or what someone looks like on the outside.

Another reason to have great boundaries and be sure to recharge! **Do you have anything coming up in 2026 that you'd like to highlight?**

Absolutely! We just finished our annual **Pathways to Hope Conference**, which brought together over 1,600 community members to reduce stigma and advance conversations around better mental health care. We are excited about the 2026 NAMIWalks San Antonio — registration is open now, and it's one of the biggest opportunities for our community to come together to raise funds and awareness so we can continue offering our free programs. Additionally, we are holding the inaugural NAMIWalks Kendall County and we can't wait to expand our services to that community. We are also continuing to expand our **Bridges to Care** training initiative, empowering everyday people — from faith communities to nonprofits — to become mental health champions. It's going to be a meaningful year.



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