

A message from Bill and Mary Bowers:

We are proud members of NAMI Tallahassee. We were introduced to NAMI when we signed up for the Family-to-Family course many years ago. We were looking for support as we dealt with the mental illness of our daughter Brook. When Brook was 16 years old she experienced a traumatic event that set off a lifetime struggle for her with depression and suicidal thoughts. At the age of 31, she died of suicide. That was January 2012.

That's the sad part of our story. But we like stories that end with a hopeful beginning. Here's ours.

Last March the NAMI Tallahassee Board of Directors came to us to ask if they could set up a memorial running event in Brook's name. They said it would be a tribute to Brook and others lost to suicide, and raise funds for NAMI Tallahassee programs. We didn't hesitate. We not only agreed to naming the event for Brook, but we both wanted to do everything we could to help make it a success.

That's how the Bluebird Run for Brookie B got started. A group of dedicated NAMI Tallahassee Board members put together a 5K Run and 1 Mile Walk on Labor Day morning of last year. It was quite a project for a group of people with no experience putting on such an event, and with just 5 months to prepare.

Long before the first runner showed up on Labor Day morning, the event was a huge success as a fundraiser. The committee had worked tirelessly to promote the event and to reach out to sponsors. Primarily through sponsorships, we raised over \$24,000. *Every penny of this will be used locally for suicide prevention, and all the other important NAMI Tallahassee programs.*

On Labor Day morning most of the 70 volunteers showed up in the dark to set up for the race. You read that right – 70 volunteers! Then the runners and walkers arrived. And they kept coming and coming. Our registration volunteers were nearly overwhelmed. 350 souls participated in the inaugural Bluebird Run for Brookie B.

The turnout was astounding. But in retrospect, maybe it should not have been surprising. Our message of suicide awareness and prevention struck a chord. It seems like whenever we share our suicide and mental illness experiences with someone, there is a sudden recognition. They have a family member, or a friend or a neighbor who has mental illness, or they know someone who is dealing with the mental illness of loved ones. It's everywhere. We all need support, and we all need to know that we can be happy again.

Beyond all the money raised, and beyond the number of people that participated, we were humbled by what we heard from participants. A man who had lost his son to suicide just two months earlier found the strength to run the 5K and talk about his experience. A woman whose husband attempted suicide said she never knew about all the resources available here in Tallahassee until the Bluebird Run. A cross country coach wanted to be sure that the kids on his team experienced both this fun community event and the message about suicide awareness and prevention.

We are still excited about the many ways in which the inaugural Bluebird Run was successful. It did a lot of good for a lot of people. Congratulations and thank you to everyone who was a part of this – committee members, volunteers, sponsors, donors, and participants.

Now I have the privilege of being the event coordinator for the 2016 Bluebird Run. Of course we are going to do it again. We have learned much and we have a great base to build on. We are going to have a lot of fun this coming year and we will again do a lot of good. It is a combination you just can't beat. This kind of stuff feeds your soul.

If you are looking for a place to put your heart or at least some of your valuable time, please look further at our web site. There are so many ways to be a part of this touching event. Please join us in the 2016 Bluebird Run for Brookie B.

Thank you!

Bill and Mary