

NAMI Wisconsin Conference 2016  
Connecting Heart to Heart  
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WOW! I could not picture a more beautiful setting for a mental health conference than the Osthoff Resort located on Elkhart Lake. This is the heart of our Northern Kettle Moraine Unit --so to say I was immediately in heaven would be an understatement.

Each year I attend the State conference I meet so many new people and get the opportunity to see the dedicated staff of NAMI Wisconsin reap the fruits of their labor. A big thank you to all of them for their efforts. This year's conference did not disappoint with a wide variety of topics for each breakout session. How does one choose? I thought..."Tool Box." What do I need to add to my recovery box of tools?

Keynotes...I could review all of them but you can find that information both [kenoshanami.org](http://kenoshanami.org) and [namiwisconsin.org](http://namiwisconsin.org) Now looking back, I can hear the thunderous applause for keynote speaker Alice Holstein. She is a compact unassuming messenger from LaCrosse whose not so simple journey sent a powerful message that kicks acceptance up to a level I never imagined. Hmmm, what if I could transcend my life's journey? That is to find it as a path toward grace? Great material to inspire anyone to move one's life forward. Her book entitled [A Tough Grace](#) can be found on Amazon.

Well, I have to lose weight.....only 50 pounds so "Why Dieting Doesn't Work" appealed to me. This was an introduction to wellness coaching and being mindful of what you eat as well as preparing and savoring the whole experience. So I guess pounding down an apple and cheese sticks with a bottle of water is not as healthy as I once thought. Interesting enough we were given a small chocolate and asked to actually consume it in 3 bites. Of course my mind instantly went to where is the rest of the bag. Now I have a wellness coach to access via phone in my "toolbox."

"Incorporating Mindfulness Practices into your Recovery" was another enlightening workshop. I was first introduced to mindfulness years ago but this was so simple. Take a walk and actually appreciate your surroundings. You mean listen to the numerous sounds of birds and smell the newly mowed grass. See the wide variety of trees and the shapes of their leaves. Perhaps feeling the sand between your toes. It's pretty basic stuff. Just be present in the moment and use all of your senses to enrich your day. Also remember to be grateful along the way!

I wanted to add one of the "Ask the Doctor" sessions. I know many people who live with Schizophrenia and Schizoaffective disorder but I honestly don't understand it. What I found out in this workshop was there are almost as many varieties of this illness as there are people who live with it. Wrap your mind around that fact for a moment. I also listened to the many advances in treatment and medications. However, the message was clear that childhood trauma especially in a formative first five years can severely influence/ impact onset. So I on to my next kick...let's continue to work to prevent the onset of mental health.

I just want to say a big thanks to NAMI Kenosha for sponsoring both Cynthia Skarda and myself; followed by an even bigger thanks to NAMI Kenosha and all the special people who lead by example, support and encourage me to move forward in my journey.