



NAMI Pinellas County, Florida, Inc.

(formerly National Alliance for the Mentally Ill)



Clearwater* Dunedin* Largo* Oldsmar* Palm Harbor* St. Petersburg* Tarpon Springs

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August 1, 2004

Colonel Christopher A. Knight
Director, Florida Highway Patrol
Neil Kirkman Bldg.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0550

Dear Colonel Knight:

A recent story in the St. Petersburg *Times* once again brings to our attention the outstanding job the Florida State Troopers of the Pinellas Park District do on the Sunshine Skyway Bridge. The nail-biting account of the rescue by troopers **Mark Cross and Daniel Cole** of a man threatening to commit suicide by jumping off the bridge exemplifies the heroic efforts those officers are prepared to do on a daily basis. We know they have saved an untold number of lives of persons either experiencing a major emotional crisis in their lives or suffering from a mental illness. For these acts of courage and compassion, the troopers deserve our praise.

For over five years **NAMI (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) Pinellas County** has been involved in the presentations at the 40-hour **crisis intervention training (CIT)** sessions. We and the over 500 law enforcement officers who have attended, including several troopers who work the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, have learned a lot. The presenters, all professionals, family members, or consumers from the local mental health community, volunteer their time and talent to provide the most up-to-date information regarding mental illnesses, medications, de-escalation techniques, Baker Act authority and changes, unusual behaviors, such as suicide, homicide, and aggressiveness, and, most important, are the several hours spent in discussion with persons with mental illness when no one is in crisis.

In May 2002, **Pinellas Park District Troopers** were presented with a **NAMI Pinellas County "Iris Award"** given to persons or organizations that deserve recognition for their efforts in to fulfill NAMI's mission of: improving the lives of persons with mental illnesses. The inscription is as true today as it was then, and read: "for your heroic efforts in protecting and serving the citizens of Pinellas County, particularly those suffering from extreme emotional distress."

NAMI will continue to advocate for the safe and humane treatment of persons with mental illness. And, we will also continue to salute the efforts of law enforcement for their many safe interventions as was done by **Florida State Troopers Mark Cross and Daniel Cole**. I hope the **Florida Highway Patrol** will continue to send troopers to CIT.

Sincerely,

Donald G. Turnbaugh
CIT Coordinator,
NAMI Pinellas County

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