NAFI/NFI 40th Anniversary Commemorative Booklet

Looking Back and Looking Ahead

Learning from Yesterday, Appreciating Today and Shaping Tomorrow.
What a wonderful celebration – NFI’s fortieth birthday – 40 years of remarkable service to our fellow men, women and children that began humbly, but with great hope, in a garage in Marblehead, Massachusetts 40 years ago.

Who would have ever believed that Yitzhak Bakal, a young man born in Baghdad, Iraq, could have had the vision and drive to build this great organization – NAFI/NFI!

Change is the norm in our world. We live in a society in which few organizations last more than one or two generations. NAFI/NFI is, however, one of those rule-breakers. It beat the odds by virtue of its unique culture, its entrepreneurial spirit, and the wonderful people who embraced the Normative Approach propounded by Dr. Bakal. Throughout its history, its creativity met the difficult challenge of providing social services in bad as well as good times.

Culture is what NAFI/NFI is all about. It starts with Dr. Bakal who inspires all by his leadership, his vision and the Normative Community. His belief that building communities of sharing and trust, whether in the home, office or in NAFI/NFI’s many programs is essential to the mission of the organization.

How does this happen? It starts with leadership. When the economy crashed in 2008 and NAFI/NFI experienced tremendous funding cutbacks, Dr. Bakal and many of his key leaders stood up and voluntarily took pay cuts. These leaders sent a message to the agency community that everyone should feel the pain, not just field people and clients. I do not know of many organizations where this has ever happened.

NAFI/NFI’s sense of caring and commitment permeates the whole organization. Although NAFI/NFI staff provides great services for their clients, they are more than employees – they lead lives inspired by high ideals and a sense of service. I feel privileged as a board member to get to know them and to help them perform their work.

NAFI/NFI’s culture is remarkable but so is its entrepreneurial spirit. Since its founding during the governorship of Frank Sargent, NAFI/NFI has demonstrated steadfast innovation and creativity. When the Commonwealth decided to privatize social service programs, NAFI/NFI quickly became a leader in this transformational movement. It remains so today, as it constantly adjusts to bureaucratic and financial challenges. It is both nimble and innovative in fulfilling its mission.

Happy Birthday NAFI/NFI – We love and admire you!
Words from NAFI/NFI’s Board of Directors

Roger Marcorelle – “I am amazed at the enormous commitment of the people in the organization. When asked how long employees have been here and they respond 20, 25, and even 30 years, it is amazing that there is such loyalty within this organization… people sense that they are not there for themselves but are there to make a difference...”

Nancy Grossman – “…I have been connected to NAFI/NFI since 1974 when Dr. Bakal started his first program from his garage. There are so many parts to this organization that make my heart melt and there is no question of the commitment of the people that are here to advance the mission. Dr. Bakal has set a remarkable tone with his openness to new ideas... it is very exciting to be on the cutting edge with programs and with youth.”

Bill Madaus – “NFI and NAFI really grew out of deinstitutionalization and a real commitment to community-based services. Every board meeting I attend and walk away from, I am not only impressed by the innovation that is going on, but also the degree of professionalism of the staff and the absolute commitment to the mission. I have never seen an agency rally around a mission the way this agency does and keep it utmost in their minds.”

Barbara Vinick – “I joined the board over thirty years ago and I have witnessed the tremendous growth of this organization and the extreme risk-taking through enormous change. The long-term commitment of so many wonderful people in this organization is impressive. I leave every meeting feeling so happy to be a part of this organization.”

Matthew Sagal – “I am a new member of the board but one thing that has struck me about NAFI/NFI’s programs and achievements is the fact NAFI/NFI can serve as a role model for other social service agencies in other parts of the country and other parts of the world.”

Jim Zafris – “The thing that impresses me most about NAFI/NFI is how its leaders are always thinking ahead of the curve. This is such an unpredictable business, dependent on politics and unreliable funding, and yet there is always a new innovative program in the works that no one else has created. These innovations have helped carry out NAFI/NFI’s mission and keep it successful.”

Barney Weinstein – “I think that NAFI has demonstrated a real spirit of innovation and dedication and I have to say that I really am thrilled about its new work in early intervention and prevention. It has been very effective in getting people from disparate communities to understand that, although we have mutual differences, at heart, we are all the same.”
40th Anniversary, A Reflection on Yesterday in Anticipation of Tomorrow

Dr. Yitzhak Bakal, President, NAFI/NFI

From institutions and hospitals to group homes, from congregate care to home-based services, from community-based programs to early intervention and prevention initiatives utilizing innovative community-building strategies, NAFI/NFI’s 40-year pacesetting journey has been remarkable. We continually broke new ground as we developed evolving levels of care to meet changing needs and new realities.

Through four decades, NAFI/NFI has proactively pioneered reform that has become the hallmark of serving children, youth, adults and families across the country. Yet, while we grew from a single outreach program in Malden, Massachusetts to a diverse, multi-state agency, we have never undertaken growth for growth’s sake or survival at any cost. To the credit of our dedicated leaders and staff, our focus has remained on forming communities that engage and encourage high participation from all of its members. Our Normative Community Approach helped us stay the course and keep our clients front and center.

Today NAFI/NFI programs and services are renowned nationally for achieving healing and treatment success with quality, empowerment and by helping people help themselves. We have been proactive and encouraged entrepreneurship and risk-taking. We regularly analyzed our work, trying to learn from our mistakes and looked for new ways to advance our mission. There were times when we stumbled, or felt beaten by budget cuts and by rigid and mindless bureaucracy. Yet we never compromised the quality and safety of our charges. That level of quality, integrity and committed care for our clients established us as leaders in the fields of behavioral health, education and home-based services.

As we contemplate the ever-evolving changes that will impact our work, we must continue to be proactive and look for creative solutions that combine improvement in care even though we are mindful of the need to cut cost. We will lead the way by integrating behavioral health with early intervention and prevention initiatives. We hope to intervene with entire communities helping them partner with us to help themselves. It is a course with many challenges that we look forward to undertaking with the same pacesetting innovation that we have in the past.

As I look back at our 40 years of achievements I feel confident that NAFI/NFI will continue to write new chapters of excellence of care. And it will remain forward looking, and a vital organization that takes necessary risks to better people’s lives. Our commitment and willingness to meet challenges head on are critical values that will underscore our NAFI/NFI of the future.
Bravo!

Hildy Paris, Chief Operating Officer, NAFI/NFI

I joined NAFI/NFI 25 years ago after spending numerous breakfast meetings with Dr. Bakal discussing the prospect of leaving state government to join NAFI, an entrepreneurial agency that he started with the belief that organizational bureaucracy could be replaced with agency consensus building. I recognized then, the uniqueness of his leadership style and his ability to create an organization that was more like a family and a close knit community. I’ve witnessed a lot of growth and many changes in the years since then but that spirit and commitment to the mission has never wavered.

Dr. Bakal has instilled in us his “normative approach” which is utilized by all NAFI/NFI programs to unite diverse people around a shared mission and then empower them to make their own unique contributions. NAFI/NFI is built upon a culture of trust and sharing, where leaders are encouraged to take chances and be entrepreneurial in service to the children and families we represent. When a risk pays off, we share the benefits and opportunities across the agency. When a risk proves painful, we share the lessons across the agency and help one another overcome challenges.

This entrepreneurial courage has kept NAFI/NFI on the front lines of change for 40 years. From the dismantling of institutions to the advent of community-based care and family-based services, we have fought to secure maximum empowerment and independence for all of our clients. The move toward evidence based programming and community building prevention initiatives has us pushing again as we seek to secure new resources to do more for people in the most effective and humane manner possible.

I am motivated by our mission and core values every day. As the Chief Operating Officer, my role is to empower our staff and secure every advantage possible to allow NAFI/NFI to continue driving innovation and standards of excellence. I celebrate 40 years of NAFI/NFI with all of you and with our clients, past, present and future. May we remember to celebrate every milestone and think outside of the box, so we will maintain the integrity of Dr. Bakal’s early vision and hard work as we adapt to the ever-changing needs and opportunities of the world we live in. For all the great achievements over the past 40 years, as Dr. Bakal would say “Bravo”!

Celebrating 40 Years

Steve Hahn, Executive Director, NFI MASSACHUSETTS

NAFI/NFI is celebrating 40 years of sustained success, an impressive accomplishment for any business.

When Dr. Bakal, our founder, opened the doors of Northeastern Family Institute in 1974, thousands of Massachusetts citizens were still confined to various types of state institutions, including reform schools for delinquent youth and mental hospitals for adults. Despite good intentions, residents of such places were immersed in institutional settings that were completely disconnected from community life and the outcomes were often poor and very sad. A high percentage of delinquent youth later ended up in adult prisons while the grounds of former state hospitals are dotted with cemeteries that serve as the final resting place for those who lived out their adult lives as hospital patients. Dr. Bakal was at the forefront of a movement of individuals who had a vision for how to close these institutions and replace them with restorative community programming capable of helping people better manage their problems, reclaim their lives as citizens and achieve the promise of community living.
40 years and many new programs later, I am happy to say that NFI Massachusetts still stands as a well-respected provider that operates a wide range of innovative services for youths, families and adults served within the juvenile justice, child welfare, mental health, developmental disabilities and brain injury fields.

Not only did Dr. Bakal have a vision for community based services, he also had a clear idea about the type of organization he wanted to create and the culture that would best support it. Instead of forming an oppressive, top-down bureaucracy, he stimulated and promoted creativity, innovation and intelligent risk taking among its managers, myself included. One of the earliest lessons I learned from him was that it was permissible to explore new, even unconventional territory if it made sense and benefitted those we served. For example, in taking my first job with NFI in a group home for adults discharged from Danvers State Hospital, the staff member I replaced wasn’t a social worker like me. Instead, she had been a patient at the state hospital for many years. To Dr. Bakal, it made perfect sense. Who better to help people make the difficult transition back to the community than someone who had been there herself? It’s only been within the past five years that people with “lived experience” have become an accepted part of the mental health workforce. In 1980, it was unheard of!

Another key ingredient in Dr. Bakal’s recipe for building a successful organization was to establish a culture of decency and respect for both our clients and staff with a firm belief that everyone should have a voice into how we live and work together. It is the essence of our enduring normative approach. It establishes what the late Dr. Gene Moore referred to as “affective commitment” to the organization. For most, it’s a mission not just a job.

As the Executive Director of NFI Massachusetts, I have had the privilege of being around for 34 out of NFI’s 40 year history. Many other senior staff members have been here for lengthy periods and have a good historical appreciation for NFI. While holding on to the basic qualities that make us special, we have worked hard to move forward, addressing new challenges and emerging needs in the field in addition to implementing new programming and state-of-the-art practices such as trauma informed care and incorporating youth and family voice at every level of our organization. We trust that this dual strategy will keep NFI relevant, resilient and prepared for a quickly changing world.

40 Years and Going Strong!
Paul L. Dann, PhD, Executive Director, NFI North

More than 40 years ago Dr. Bakal had a vision. He believed that institutions were ill equipped to help individuals and families solve their problems. He believed that people should be treated with respect, that they had a right to live within their own home and community and that they themselves held the key to their own success. He also believed that he could bring people together to create an organization whose focus would be the creation of innovative in-home and community based services.

Dr. Bakal’s formula for success combined his core beliefs with the knowledge that people, when given the opportunity to belong to something meaningful, can come together and surmount any challenge that they encounter. Through his Normative Community Approach Dr. Bakal attracted a talented and committed pool of people that share his vision. Slowly, one program at a time, he built one of the most competent and complex organizations known to the mental health and helping profession.

“I first met Yitzhak in 1973 in my role as a member of DYS’s first formal program evaluation unit. Yitzhak provided a series of trainings. I could not help but be impressed with Yitzhak’s clinical and program skills, but most importantly, his caring for DYS kids and staff. He was energetic, creative, and respectful at all times. As he transitioned to NAfi and I to KEY, our professional paths crossed numerous times. My first impressions in 1973 have remained the same over the years. Thousands of kids’ lives and thousands of staff have been and continue to be positively impacted by Yitzhak. Congratulations to a truly gifted man.”

Bill Lyttle, President,
KEY Program Inc.
Twenty-three years ago when we began NFI North we brought the same ideals and beliefs to bear in an effort to address the pressing needs of people across the States of New Hampshire and Maine. We too attracted a strong core group of individuals that shared our vision of helping people to live with respect and dignity within their own home and community. We also began this part of the NAFI/NFI experience by building first one, then two, then three and now twenty-four services. Each service was unique in its own way while at the same time sharing the Agency’s core values.

With the advent of the Agency’s 40th anniversary we find ourselves looking back on our roots and reflecting on how our early days inform who we are and who we will become. So much has changed over the past 40 years. We’ve gone from pay phones and pagers to Iphones and face time. We once marveled at the Agency’s first computer, an Apple IIC, tucked in the corner of our finance director’s office. Now we work in an environment with a thousand machines across the six corporations. We communicate in an instant and move information effortlessly across and between organizations while surrounding ourselves with social media.

And while there has been a great deal of change we know the importance of holding fast to our core beliefs. The very beliefs that have informed us since the organization’s inception continue to anchor us in the delivery of essential services. We know the importance of treating people with respect and dignity, of helping people to live successfully within their own home and community, and the importance of building lasting partnerships with the people we serve and the people who work with us.

I marvel at where we’ve come during the past 40 years. How we’ve learned and grown together in times of great change. As I reflect on our history it’s clear that our closely held values and beliefs have informed us each step along the way. Come what may, our values have taught us that even the greatest challenge is simply an opportunity yet to be revealed. It’s from this vantage point that I revel in what the next 40 years will bring! Happy Anniversary NAFI/NFI!

NFI Vermont: Our first Venture out of Massachusetts

Dr. Chuck Myers, Executive Director, NFI Vermont

In 1984, the State of Vermont reached out to NFI (at that time only 10 years old and only providing services in Massachusetts) and invited us to develop programs to divert children and adolescents from the state psychiatric hospital. NFI responded and met the challenge with a proposal to develop a comprehensive continuum of care including crisis stabilization, residential care, and therapeutic foster care. Our proposal was accepted and NFI Vermont was born. This year as NAFI is celebrating our 40th anniversary, NFI Vermont is celebrating our 30th anniversary.

NFI quickly established a reputation for offering high quality treatment in small programs focusing on intense needs of children and families. Our programs became known as places where the Department of Mental Health and the Department for Children and Families could refer their most challenging youth to get a chance to heal and grow. With our help, the state of Vermont came to rely less on out-of-state and residential placements and more on treating children at home or in their communities.
NFI Vermont continued to diversify program type and funding, including developing several alternative schools and marketing services to private insurance companies. As we continued to refine our system of direct services to consumers, we focused on several areas intensely. Our insightful, gifted, and highly committed staff studied directly with internationally renowned clinicians and researchers in the areas of Complex Trauma, and Wraparound. We translate these learnings into our programs.

We also have developed new roles in the quickly changing healthcare environment including consultation and training about complex trauma and consulting with communities about implementing Therapeutic Wraparound. We now consult to and train organizations in the fields of mental health, child welfare, education, juvenile justice, and corrections. In addition, we have been asked by several communities to consult with them to develop Wraparound and Trauma Informed Services. We are involved in state-wide efforts to change the health care system.

Over the last 30 years NFI Vermont has been highly recognized for providing cutting edge mental health and education services that are individualized for adolescents and families who are in some of the most challenging situations. As we move forward into our next 30 years, we are inspired by those who came before us. We are grateful for the opportunity to work with so many courageous adolescents and families, who share their struggles and accomplishments with us as they make important changes in their lives. We are hopeful for the future as we collaborate with individuals, their families, and other community partners to create new realities from possibilities not yet known.

A Noble Dream Turns 40

Lynn Bishop, Executive Director & Amy Lefebvre, Director of Operations, NAFI Connecticut

NAFI/NFI was built by a true visionary who 40 years ago had a noble dream. With his passion for helping others, his strategic abilities and his wife by his side, he solidified a foundation for success by building an agency culture that would allow for sustainable success. This culture is rooted in core values that supersede political agendas or economic challenges as it is based on the timeless belief that people, staff and consumers alike can overcome obstacles when we come together as one; a community. Over the past 40 years, it is this core belief that continues to allow NAFI/NFI to thrive despite challenges, honor the diversity and strengths of each region and continue to grow within NAFI/NFI.

Dr. Bakal’s dream resulted in a well-respected, national nonprofit organization providing diverse and innovative services for people in need. NAFI CT is one of the many proud corporations founded by Dr. Bakal. NAFI CT is celebrating 20 years this year as NAFI/NFI celebrates 40 years. Following the shared vision of Dr. Bakal, NAFI CT has developed into a leading nonprofit organization in the State by valuing the power of the community. We are a multi-service agency that provides programming, consultation and individualized support services to youth, families and adults in a variety of settings. NAFI CT has strategically adapted to the changing landscape of services in Connecticut throughout the years and thus is currently a leading provider in implementing effective evidence and community based programming as well as a recognized expert in gender responsive services for girls. The continuum of services offered throughout rural, suburban and urban communities across Connecticut provides quality care to over 1100 families and individuals annually.
Along with the belief in the power of the community, NAFI CT has also balanced our consistent expansion and development by focusing on ensuring quality service delivery. The success and outstanding reputation of our organization is based on the diverse talents and dedication of NAFI CT employees who help each client reach his/her highest potential. Sharing the same vision and dream as Dr. Bakal 40 years ago, we have built a foundation that ensures a bright future for NAFI CT.

40 Years and Onward!

Dr. Jim Isenberg, Executive Director, NAFI New York

“Live from New York”? “Onward”? This is the reality of life in the NAFI New York Region! Our young Region is a talented, diverse organization focused on building a strong, innovative network of Community Based Programs across New York State. As the newest member of the national NAFI/NFI organization, I want to wish Dr. Bakal and all of my NAFI colleagues warm congratulations on the 40th Anniversary of this great organization!

The NY Region is actively engaged delivering three principal programs. We have the Wraparound Foster Care program which focuses on bringing youth back into communities in a safe, family atmosphere. Many of our youth have been in residential or hospital settings for a long time so the Wraparound program is a model for community based programs as well as a huge cost saving benefit for NY counties!

The NY Region has also created a Family Wraparound Program which serves as a model for “keeping families” intact and reducing the possibility of young people being taken from their homes. As part of our “evidence based’ program initiative”, the NY Region’s work with the Parenting with Love and Limits Program has created an important new venture for NAFI and PLL. The PLL program has been recognized for its excellent work with parents and youth both by local NY counties and the entire PLL organization.

In addition to these innovative New York programs, I have been very involved with my YouthLink colleagues in the creation of the Youth Police Initiative (YPI) “trust building” program which has worked with police departments and young people from across the country. The YPI program is a national success and has demonstrated NAFI’s great value as a community builder!

Finally, on a personal note, I want to acknowledge the great leadership of Dr. Bakal during the past 40 years. I’ve served NAFI as both an Executive Director as well as the Board Chair and have worked closely with the entire Executive team of this fine organization. It’s evident that his leadership and the commitment of all NAFI employees have insured that NAFI’s 40th Anniversary is an important benchmark for the celebration of past, present and future successes! Congratulations to the entire NAFI family! And now, ONWARD NAFI, there’s much more work to do!
Prevention, Early Intervention and Community-Building

Jay Paris, Director of Program Development and Services, Director of Youth Link

NAFI/NFI’s first employee 40 years ago had exceptional characteristics. He had a powerful conviction that disenfranchised kids and families could greatly better their lives if given a chance to participate in their own wellbeing. He had the ability to shape his vision in a way that others could grasp, and he had the courage to take risks and be decisive without leaving others behind. Because he was also NAFI/NFI’s founder, executive director and human services manager, he hired others who had similar qualities of courage and leadership. Little by little this burgeoning agency born in a North Shore garage became known for its signature way of never compromising its core beliefs when finding new and innovative ways to help individuals and families heal.

For 40 years the path has wound down many streets that were at times blocked by unexpected obstacles. But NAFI/NFI’s ethos of being bold, entrepreneurial and mission-driven has remained constant as it took on deinstitutionalization for individuals, then community-based care in the context of families and, eventually, helping entire communities rebuild.

I am pleased to share that these innovative community-building approaches have melded into an organization within NAFI/NFI called Youth Link, which focuses largely on creating and implementing programs and services that are preventative in nature. These include the Youth and Police Initiative (YPI), which brings beat officers and at-risk teens from challenged neighborhoods together over several weeks to build genuine communication and trust. With our YPI Train-the-Trainer model, we have brought the training to over twenty-five communities across the country and also Bermuda and Belize. Our dedicated team has also developed a Youth Leadership Academy, a cutting edge performing arts initiative called Hoop Suite, a culinary arts program that has launched a catering company and several community-building interventions in public housing developments in White Plains, NY, Providence, Rhode Island, New Haven, Connecticut and Boston. We have embraced Dr. Bakal’s philosophy of taking well-calculated risks and then learning from our successes and failures. As NAFI/NFI enters its fifth decade, we are encouraged by the opportunities ahead to impact entire neighborhoods and look forward to entering the new frontier that prevention and early intervention bring.

“Dr. Yitzhak Bakal has made a significant life time contribution to advancing a progressive, effective and humane juvenile justice agenda in Massachusetts over a period of decades. He has made NAFI/NFI a service provider that not only does good work with youth but is an organization that has helped shape policy and practice in the juvenile justice area. I personally have a lot of respect for what Dr. Bakal has contributed to the highest risk youth in the Commonwealth.”

Peter J. Forbes, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services
Deborah Yates  
*Deborah Yates, Regional Director, NAFI Southeast*

Our region’s roots reach back to 1988 and the former NAFI Mid-Atlantic Region, when NAFI began the operation of the Thomas O’Farrell Youth Center in Maryland. Through several decades, NAFI’s award winning operation of the O’Farrell Youth Center became the benchmark of all operations for NAFI Mid-Atlantic’s expansion throughout Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, the District of Columbia and Florida. In addition to residential treatment centers, NAFI’s services for vulnerable and at-risk youth included a pilot Boot Camp operation in Ohio that was also replicated in DC and Maryland; youth shelters; group homes, and the first NAFI Youth and Police Initiative Training for police cadets and at-risk youth.

We are poised to expand NAFI’s best practice services as the Southeast Region. Our mission remains the same: to provide our consumers, their families and our stakeholders with the opportunity for lasting positive change through our normative communities of dignity and respect.

Jerry Carnevale and Mary Anne McIntyre  
*Director of Operations & Education Director of NAFI Rhode Island*

As we celebrate NAFI’s 40th and NAFI Rhode Island’s 25th year anniversary we are reminded not only of where we have been but also of where we are going. We are reminded of the lessons learned, words of wisdom and vision of our founder, Dr. Yitzhak Bakal. “Turning crisis into opportunity”, being entrepreneurial and believing everyone deserves a chance because people can change. These are the three tenets that have guided our organization throughout these past 40 years. We are an agency that has flourished and has expanded by never staying stagnant but instead pushing ourselves to reinvent, adapt and be innovative.

NAFI RI is a great example of this. We have moved from primarily being a continuum of residential care services twenty five years ago to a network of diverse programs ranging from secure residential, group homes, foster care, outreach and tracking and family based programs. As we developed this Network we also expanded into the adult world and began programming for adult clients with chronic mental illness. Last year we were able to close the circle of services provided by the NAFI/RI Network by acquiring Psychological Centers. With this addition to our network, we’ve added preventative services, including MST teams, community-based children’s counseling services, and an outpatient clinic.

We continue to uphold our traditions of community service and network-wide events, keeping our sense of family strong, even as our “family” continues to grow and spread further out across Rhode Island. In congratulating NAFI on its 40 years, we in RI look forward to another 25 years of expansion, excellence and resilience as we continue to live out our mission.
Psychological Centers

Dr. Paul Block, Director of NAFI-Rhode Island’s Outpatient and Community Based Services (Former Director of Psychological Centers)

After discussions with a number of organizations, I was unsure about whether to even try to keep Psych Centers open. While I didn’t want our almost 100 staff and thousands of patients to lose the opportunities offered by our services, I also didn’t want them to be part of something that had our name but was otherwise unrecognizable. Our success was built on effectiveness – we use the scientific method to guide our treatment and outcome evaluation to demonstrate the results.

As I sat at a table of fellow CEOs, including several with whom I’d recently been in discussions, I noticed Susan Giblin, Assistant Operations Director of NAFI Rhode Island, which triggered a very fond memory of a visit that Hildy Paris had arranged for us with Lynn Bishop and the impressive team at NAFI CT. Hildy, who we respect and just like as much as everyone does, agreed to meet. She and Peter Carey, whose perspective on collaboration and the community-service mission were perfectly aligned with Psych Centers’, arranged for Chuck Myers, Executive Director of NFI VT, to visit and check us out. After a series of talks in which the ways we operated and the reasons for managing services the way we did never even came up, Chuck grilled us detail by detail for at least a couple of hours (felt like more), and left us with hopeful optimism for the first time in several years. Then I met Dr. Bakal, and anyone who has met Yitzhak Bakal knows that was the end of the decision making for us. We were thrilled that NAFI/NFI agreed to move forward and take over our operations, and have been truly happy to become part of the organization.

People at NAFI talked a lot with us about the need for our organization’s two cultures to blend. But what we have found is that NAFI/NFI is as inherently committed to the same core values of caring about our staff – about the integrity and quality of our services and caring about our clients as we are. Where our cultures differ, for example in the mild deviancy that leads us to pull annual April 1st pranks on our staff, NAFI has been tolerant of our norms and laughed with us as well as at us. Poking fun at ourselves is part of our approach to celebrating our frailties as opportunities for improvement. We’ve appreciated the opportunity NAFI offers us to do that.

Congratulations on 40 Years of Service

Donna J. Neely, CPA  (781)-551-0040  dneely@qrgacpa.com
“What I love about NAFI is the people, all of them are connected and united in supporting the mission and in service to the people they serve.”

Andy Quinn, NAFI Connecticut Board Chair

“To me, NAFI is more than the place I work. It is the place that allows me to do the work that I am truly passionate about: helping youth and their families to be successful.”

Mariana DaCruz, NAFI CT Program Director – MultiDimensional Treatment Foster Care

“When I first started I thought that there was no hope for me but now I am a man of dignity. I have much more confidence in myself. So many times I wanted to give up but now I wake up in the morning and look in the mirror and tell myself that I can do it.”

NAFI Rhode Island client

“I tried everything to get kicked out of NAFI that I had tried in other places but staff would not let it happen. At the ACE Program, I learned how to read, write letters and write poems. Now I can read just like I speak and I am learning history, science and math with other kids.”

NAFI Rhode Island client

“You guys pretty much raised me and I give you and staff a lot of respect for that. I just want you to know how much I appreciate everything you did for me. “

NAFI Rhode Island client

“I would like to thank the NAFI Professional Parent Program. You have truly made a difference in the lives of families who come to our agency. Due to your support, (we) are able to provide more comprehensive services to victims of domestic violence.”

Linda Impagliazzo, Executive Director, Blackstone Valley Advocacy Center

“Dr. Bakal was a pioneer in bucking the trend against institutional settings for children. In establishing NAFI/NFI he created group care programs that are warm, caring and developmentally supportive while clinically sophisticated. Thousands of children and families have benefitted from the organization that was created through his inspired leadership, his humanity and his skill as a clinician…”

Edward Dolan, Massachusetts Commissioner of Probation

“I wanted to take this opportunity to say congratulations as you celebrate the 40th anniversary of North American Family Institute. What a great accomplishment to achieve. Although the Loudoun County Youth Shelter is only one small program compared to all the other programs in the many states operated by NAFI, I believe many great things have been accomplished here. The one thing above all that I have always appreciated about NAFI staff is the willingness to listen to concerns and make changes big or small when needed. I believe this speaks to the professionalism of your organization and most definitely is modeled from the top of the organization, so I thank you for this.”

Hope Stonerook, Deputy Director, Loudoun County, Virginia Department of Family Services

“While many organizations talk big, NAFI acts big. They have gone into the belly of the beast—Boston’s toughest neighborhood – and made a difference. And they are still making a difference every day, saving lives and bringing teens hope and support like never before.”

William Gross, Boston Police Department, Superintendent-in-Chief
My Tribute to Yitzhak Bakal

Andrew Vachss, Children’s Defense Attorney and Author

All young people look for Guideposts throughout their lives. Some search intellectually; some in the street, and some in their “homes”, searching for any EXIT sign. I spent a lot of my younger years looking for those Guideposts. I looked in a lot of places, some of them dangerous. I did a lot of things… some of them not well-advised. Finally, I came to realize that those Guideposts I sought would not be found in religion, or in DNA-connections. My family is my Family of Choice. And, to me, the war to protect children is the only “holy war” truly worthy of the name. I believe the human race is a race… and we’re not winning it. But we haven’t lost it, either. Not yet. Those warriors who stand against the destruction of our species cannot be identified by their rhetoric. You know them only by their behavior.

I hope this explains why, on the 40th anniversary of NAFI/NFI’s birth, I salute its father as among our planet’s greatest warriors. And why I am proud to say that I love him as my brother.

I remember, as if it were yesterday, the birth of what is now NAFI/NFI. It was born from Yitzhak’s indomitable refusal to surrender, from his passionate belief that there must a better way, and from his risk-it-all determination to prove that “change” with “at-risk youth” could be more than some proposal-writer’s buzzwords.

I remember the first tentative steps at establishing programs that put achievement above those “stats” the government regards as Sacred Scrolls. I remember the empowerment of people to make change—people no other agency would ever even hire, much less trust with such a mission. I remember the stumbles, the falls, the roadblocks, the pain … and how this made the eventual triumph all the sweeter.

When the euphoria of “deinstitutionalization” passed, when those magical grants dried up, when the quick-fix rhetoricians faded back into their much-deserved obscurity … Yitzhak kept walking toward the goal of the mission. I remember when those who blathered endlessly about their commitment to the “revolution” in youth work had returned to their true roles, and become the bureaucrats and businessmen they always were. And I remember Yitzhak Bakal as the last man standing.

Now, NAFI/NFI will stand forever.

It is one of the great honors of my life to have participated, in very slight ways, toward NAFI/NFI’s survival back in the days where the workload it carried seemed too heavy to lift, and the odds against its success seemed insurmountable.

Materialism may satisfy some, but it counts for nothing. No one can wish for more than to have mattered, to have actually made a difference. To have changed lives, changed minds, and changed opportunities for others. If the earth is no different from your passage over it, if you have left no footprints, no trail for others to follow, what purpose did you serve?

So let others have their plaques, their little tributes and their self-promotional brochures: The very existence of NAFI/NFI, never mind its incredible growth, speaks for itself. And it will continue to speak long after you and I have left this place. That makes Yitzhak Bakal as close to an immortal as any of us will ever meet.

I know that NAFI/NFI is not one man’s triumph. I know it could not have been possible without the contribution of so many, for so long. All involved have earned my deepest respect. But none more than the man who gave them the chance to be more than they ever dreamed of being: My brother, Yitzhak.
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Anonymous Donor

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to find independence and to build on strengths and experiences that help shape successful futures.
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