



## **Sue Abderholden**

Executive Director, NAMI Minnesota, Advocate, Lover of Books.

Google “Sue Abderholden.” You need not spend much time amidst the photos, bios, and articles to understand: she’s made a career of improving the lives of others.

Abderholden is executive director for NAMI Minnesota (National Alliance on Mental Illness). For the last 14 years, she’s led changes in public policies, created educational opportunities, and sparked support networks, helping to transform public attitudes and perceptions about people with mental illnesses. It’s work – or perhaps, in Abderholden’s case, a calling – that put her in the same place as Guild’s president, Grace Tangjerd Schmitt.

“Grace has always been willing to take my calls; it’s really been a two-way street,” Abderholden says. “We’ve always referred people to Guild Incorporated for services.” But, it’s what has happened after people are referred to Guild that Abderholden has really appreciated. “If someone wasn’t having a good experience at Guild – it might not be anyone’s fault – Grace has always listened. She was never defensive. She wanted people to have the best experience and provide excellent services.”

Abderholden says listening to peoples’ experiences is critical for changing systems and eliminating stigma. “Personal stories always help you to understand how the system is or is not working,” she says. Every time I’ve reached out to Guild for someone to testify for the legislature, they’ve stepped up to the plate.”

Guild has also “stepped up” when NAMI has launched new groups or ideas, Abderholden says, like the Allies in Recovery Program and the legislative house parties held at Guild’s Community Support Program. “Guild has always been willing to look at the big picture,” she says. Every time we ask for Guild’s help or participation in something, the answer has always been yes.”

For Abderholden, it’s Tangjerd Schmitt’s leadership and longevity – and the commitment and passion of staff – that’s been at the helm of Guild’s ability to see the big picture and progress, partnering with others and making changes as needed. “All along the way, Guild has looked for ways to innovate,” she says, pointing to Guild’s work on creating housing options like Delancey Street Apartments, their early work “to prevent commitments,” and IPS Employment Services.

“We have a really good foundation for our mental health system, but we need to keep building it,” Abderholden says. “We don’t yet know how to prevent mental illness, but we do know how to make it less disabling.” As for Guild’s part in moving the work forward, she offers this advice: “Just continue on the same trajectory – keep innovating. You’re on the ground; you’re seeing the holes; keep responding to those.”

*Photo: courtesy of Sue Abderholden*