



National Alliance on Mental Illness

nami New York State

NAMI NYS Criminal Justice

What is the Criminal Justice Program? The NAMI-NYS Criminal Justice Program provides direct assistance to families when a family member with mental illness encounters the criminal justice system. Consultation, supportive assistance and direct intervention services are provided when a family member is arrested, faces court action or is incarcerated in a state or local correctional facility.

In addition, staff works with local NAMI affiliates to better understand the criminal justice system and advocate for the kind of reform that will provide the necessary treatment and service needs of persons with mental illness. Staff participates in educational training programs across the state to enhance the understanding of mental illness among those working in the criminal justice system and help decriminalize mental illness.

Why do we need the Criminal Justice Program? Unfortunately, in New York State and across the country, large numbers of persons with mental illness pass through the criminal justice system and into jails and prisons every day. Estimates show that 10 to 15 percent of jail and prison inmates have a serious and persistent mental illness.

Inadequate availability of mental health services can lead to inappropriate care, and sometimes mistreatment of persons with mental illness. A growing body of research, information, and practical experience can help state and local governments and service providers properly treat and meet the needs of persons with mental illness. NAMI Criminal Justice Family Advocates will educate those who work in the justice system on understanding the difference between criminal behaviour that usually involves a course of conduct and a person experiencing symptoms related to brain disorders.

How will the program help families? - Provide direct assistance to families who have a loved one who is arrested, faces court action, or is confined in a state or local correctional facility.

- Provide technical assistance to NAMI affiliates interested in advocating for changes in the criminal justice and mental health systems response in serving the needs of persons with mental illness.

How will the program help change the system? - Establish community partnerships and single focus coalitions that will advocate for jail diversion initiatives in local criminal justice and mental health systems across New York State.

- Provide educational material along with information on legislative initiatives across the country that showcase successful advocacy initiatives with the justice and mental health systems in New York State and across the country.

- Participate in training programs for those working in the justice system that promote a better understanding of the needs of people with mental illness and best practices in addressing those needs such as: Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) for all first responders.

- Work with community mental health agencies in strengthening services for persons with mental illness who are either diverted out of the justice system or released from state and local correctional facilities.

- Provide support, continuing education and quarterly meetings at regional sites across the state for NAMI Criminal Justice Family Advocates. These quarterly meetings will provide a unified voice in educating our local communities along

with state legislators on what happens when a person with mental illness is caught in the justice system.

How else can we help?

Families facing a criminal justice crisis can reach the Criminal Justice Director by calling our toll free help line, 1-800- 950-3228. You can also contact us by e-mail at kathleen@naminys.org

For more information about our education, training or support programs, please call the NAMI-NYS Office at (800) 950-3228.