



## Introduction: You Can't Plug and Play with CIT

Many community leaders learn about Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) and immediately ask, "When's the next training?" It's not that simple! Unlike Family-to-Family, CIT is not a NAMI program that the local affiliate can implement by sending members to a Train the Trainer event. CIT is based on community partnerships, and is not just training. The criminalization of people with mental illness is a systems problem and the only way to fix it is to bring all the parts of the broken system together to find a solution.

## Why Are Community Partnerships Important?

- 1. You want to address the underlying problem.** The underlying problem is that too many people with serious mental illnesses do not have adequate access to mental health services, become critically ill, and cannot get adequate crisis services. The fact that too many people with serious mental illnesses are encountering law enforcement is a *symptom* of this problem, and cannot be solved by simply training officers to respond more effectively. Coordination between law enforcement and mental health providers will improve the chances that people who need treatment get it, and achieve a lasting recovery.
- 2. Funding.** Your program will have many more avenues to pursue funding if you build partnerships. Your community partners will probably be eligible for different funds than your organization, and grant-funders like to support collaborative efforts.
- 3. Long-term sustainability.** While it may seem difficult to coordinate, a CIT program built on community partnerships is more likely to endure than one sustained by just one organization.
- 4. Accountability.** Each group – law enforcement, the local NAMI, and mental health providers – have a responsibility to mental health consumers and to each other. Building a strong working relationship is the key to productively resolving your current problems, and avoiding difficulties in the future.

## How to Build Community Partnerships

### 1. Assess your community.

- ◆ Before you propose CIT as a solution to your community's criminalization problem, do a little research into the nature of the problem. How many people with mental illness are currently incarcerated in your community? Have there been any deaths of consumers or law enforcement officers during a mental health crisis? What is the current crisis response system? What resources are currently available to address this problem?
- ◆ Identify resources and allies that can help you. Contact your state NAMI and find out what other communities are doing. Is there an organization that helps communities in your state start CIT? If so, your state NAMI should know. Find out whether any other communities in your state have CIT programs and contact them. If you have any friendly contacts with the department of mental health, police/sheriff's department, or local government, contact them and see whether they would be interested in co-sponsoring a meeting, or if they can put in a good word for CIT with their supervisors.
- ◆ In many communities, tragedies have been the catalyst for starting CIT programs. Ideally, CIT should start before a tragedy strikes, but if a death or shooting does occur, be prepared to step forward and propose CIT as a constructive solution.

### 2. Identify potential partners.

- ◆ Every CIT program should involve family and consumer advocates, local law enforcement agencies, and local mental health and substance abuse providers. You may also want to consider including other groups that interact with or represent people with mental illnesses in crisis, including: probation, parole, courts, homeless services, emergency room personnel, EMTs, hospitals, correctional facilities, city or county government, other mental health advocacy groups, or peer support organizations. Make a list of the relevant organizations in your community.
- ◆ It is particularly important to include a wide range of partners from the criminal justice fields, so that CIT can be part of a comprehensive de-criminalization strategy. For example, inviting judges, lawyers and court staff to participate may spark interest in post-booking diversion programs like mental health courts.

### 3. Do your homework.

- ◆ You want to know as much as possible about potential partners before you go into a meeting with them. Find out how many officers your law enforcement

agency has sworn, how many crisis calls they receive, how much population and square mileage they cover. Try to find a sympathetic deputy or officer to talk with you in advance of the meeting. Similarly, find out about the capacity of your local crisis center or emergency room. How many crisis calls do they receive? How many staff do they have? How many people do they deal with who cycle through emergency rooms, jails, and homeless shelters but never stabilize?

#### 4. Introduce yourself, and introduce CIT.

- ◆ Invite your group of potential collaborators to a get-to-know-you meeting. Your invitation should be friendly and informative. Briefly explain that your affiliate is interested in presenting on CIT, which is an approach many communities have used to promote safety, prevent unnecessary incarceration and get people who need mental health treatment the help they need. Use the information in “CIT Facts” and “CIT Talking Points” in the NAMI CIT Advocacy Toolkit, as well as information gleaned in your research on local capacities, to write a concise letter explaining how CIT benefits all parties. If you don’t receive a response to your invitation, make a polite follow-up phone call.
- ◆ Briefly introduce NAMI. Take a few minutes to discuss NAMI’s mission, projects and the population that your affiliate represents. For general facts and information on mental illness, see NAMI’s fact sheet “Mental Illness: Facts and Numbers,” or a one-page handout on NAMI, “What is NAMI?” Both documents are available at: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org).
- ◆ Make your case: The best way to get buy-in for CIT is to show your partners what’s in it for them. Before the meeting, brainstorm about what concerns and motivations your potential partners will bring to the table. For law enforcement, this may be liability issues, concerns about officer injuries, and time spent by officers transporting individuals to mental health treatment. For mental health providers, the main concerns may be lack of capacity to handle new referrals, and the welfare of consumers.
- ◆ You may be tempted to use this opportunity to vent your frustrations with the current system, or discuss police misconduct. Resist this temptation, not because those aren’t worthwhile concerns, but because you want to build enduring relationships, and most people will withdraw from a partnership if they feel attacked.
- ◆ **Tip:** Invite an outside CIT champion to speak. Consider inviting a representative from a neighboring CIT program to come and talk about the successes of his or her program. If you anticipate some resistance from your law enforcement agency, your sheriff or chief may be more easily convinced by the experiences of another law enforcement officer.

**5. Form a steering committee.** Invite your partners to become involved in a steering committee. Your committee should include at least one representative each from NAMI, your local mental health provider and law enforcement. Before you can plan law enforcement training, you may need to address some systems issues in your community.

- ◆ Start with topics you can agree on. Create a “map” of the services and pathways a person with mental illness in crisis might encounter in your community. Envision the ideal process for getting someone to appropriate crisis services.
- ◆ Take stock of the crisis services available in your community. If necessary, discuss strategies for ensuring that more and better crisis services are available to residents.
- ◆ Discuss current law enforcement policies and procedures related to people with mental illnesses in crisis. If necessary, work with law enforcement agencies to create or amend these policies.
- ◆ Discuss the current process for transferring a person from law enforcement custody to emergency psychiatric care. Work on procedures and policies that ensure a safe, speedy transfer.
- ◆ Appoint a CIT Coordinator who will be responsible for coordinating police training. This person can be a representative from any of the partner organizations, and will be overseen by the steering committee.
- ◆ Address any additional concerns raised by partner organizations.

**6. Maintain lasting partnerships.** The partnerships you build will not be created overnight, and you shouldn't expect them to survive without some attention and care. There are several ways you can ensure that your partners stay invested in the program.

- ◆ Meet regularly. During the planning stages, you should meet regularly to resolve the “systems” issues laid out above. During and after trainings, the committee should meet to oversee the training and to respond to any concerns or problems that arise with trained officers.
- ◆ Solicit feedback. Be open-minded, and make sure at every meeting that anyone who has a concern has an opportunity to voice it. As you are planning law enforcement training, create a formal mechanism for feedback from the community. You will want to know what members of the community, consumers, family members, providers and officers think of the program.
- ◆ Apply for joint funding. See “Grant-Writing Tips for CIT Programs” in NAMI's CIT

Advocacy Toolkit for advice on how to do this.

- ◆ Get in-kind donations. In order to make your meetings and training program possible, ask each of the partner organizations to donate time, space, printing or trainers — anything that will help get the job done without straining anyone's budget. See "The Cost of CIT" in NAMI's CIT Advocacy Toolkit for ideas on how to do this.
- ◆ Ask partner organizations to provide trainers. To teach the training course, you will need presenters with a variety of expertise — mental health providers, consumers and family members, legal experts and law enforcement experts. Being involved in the training can be very empowering for individuals, and also gives the organization they represent a voice in the program.

## Resources

### **NAMI's CIT Advocacy Toolkit**

This toolkit includes basic facts on criminalization and CIT, media relations tools, and information on how to fund your program. Available at [www.nami.org/cittoolkit](http://www.nami.org/cittoolkit).

### **NAMI's CIT Technical Assistance Resource Center**

Our website, [www.nami.org/cit](http://www.nami.org/cit), highlights other information on CIT; our e-newsletter, *CIT in Action*, and links to other organizations.

### **The Council of State Governments Justice Center**

Online at: <http://justicecenter.csg.org>.

### **Criminal Justice/Mental Health Consensus Project**

Online at: <http://consensusproject.org>.

### **The University of Memphis CIT Center**

Online at: <http://cit.memphis.edu>.

### **CIT Core Elements**

Online at: <http://cit.memphis.edu/CoreElements.pdf>.