

Communities are increasingly focused on implementing effective crisis intervention programs.

The Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) model is a dynamic collaboration of law enforcement and community organizations committed to ensuring that individuals with mental health treatment needs are referred for appropriate services and supports rather than thrust into the criminal justice system. CIT programs have several essential components, including: training to help first responders (including law enforcement) better understand individuals experiencing psychiatric crisis and how to respond compassionately to a crisis; designation of officers who have completed CIT training to respond to crisis situations; collaboration between law enforcement and adult or child serving systems to create effective linkages with mental health services instead of arrest and incarceration; and inclusion of people with mental illness and their families at every level of the program.

Innovative community and CIT leaders are adapting adult CIT models to effectively respond to youth in crisis in schools and communities. For many, it is in response to the alarming number of youth with serious mental health treatment needs that become involved with law enforcement and the juvenile justice system.

NAMI advocacy leaders are uniquely positioned to promote the broader adoption of crisis intervention programs for youth in schools and communities across the nation. There are three key areas for family advocacy leaders to effectively promote crisis intervention programs for youth.

Build Community Momentum

- ◆ Bring together community stakeholders who may support implementing the program, including families, law enforcement, school officials, mental health providers, juvenile justice officials, child welfare officials, and other key stakeholders;
- ◆ Build on the success and reach of adult CIT programs—officers trained in adult CIT may be interested in bringing in crisis intervention programs for youth; and
- ◆ Promote crisis intervention programs for youth with elected officials and the media—help them see the value and benefits of the program by sharing positive personal stories related to adult CIT.

Reach Out to Schools

School-based law enforcement officers, including school resource officers (SROs), are often employed by law enforcement agencies and not schools. However, schools still have a key role to play in promoting crisis intervention programs for youth and planning specialized training for school-based officers.

- ◆ Encourage schools to join in promoting crisis intervention programs for youth to help reduce the unnecessary escalation of psychiatric crises in schools and get students with mental health treatment needs linked with effective services and supports;
- ◆ Promote training programs, like NAMI's *Parents and Teachers as Allies*, that complement crisis intervention programs for youth by educating school staff on how mental health impacts students' behavior and learning;
- ◆ Encourage school-based mental health providers—counselors, social workers, and psychologists—to join in the call for training of school-based law enforcement and implementation of crisis intervention programs for youth;

- ◆ Respond to concerns raised by schools related to “labeling” students or having to fund additional services and supports. Respect these concerns, while sharing that specialized training will help law enforcement and school staff to better understand how to address challenging behaviors, how to positively impact functional and academic achievement by linking students with appropriate services and supports, how to reduce student conflict and acting out, and how to improve school safety; and
- ◆ Emphasize that linking students with mental health treatment needs with effective services and supports helps them function better in school, at home, and in their community.

Reach Out to Law Enforcement

Law enforcement agencies are also key allies because their officers are often assigned to schools and they decide whether to offer specialized training for their school-based and community law enforcement officers.

- ◆ Build positive relationships with law enforcement officers interested in mental health, including school-based officers and SROs (who often know the students struggling with unmet mental health needs), an adult CIT officer, an officer with a child or family member with mental illness, or an officer who has also been a clinician. These individuals are natural allies;
- ◆ Promote positive media coverage of law enforcement personnel who successfully help youth with mental health treatment needs. The way a relationship is initiated can make a huge difference in partnering later down the road;
- ◆ Report positive experiences with law enforcement officers to their commanding officers related to their work with individuals impacted by mental illness to help ensure that this information is placed in their personnel record;
- ◆ Take time to understand the unique challenges and culture of law enforcement. Ask to do a ride-along with law enforcement officers. This will also help build a relationship with this critical stakeholder;
- ◆ Crisis intervention programs for youth may be more attractive to law enforcement agencies if Continuing Education Units (CEUs) and other forms of certification are available for officer training. Check with the state or local agency that trains officers to see if that is possible;
- ◆ Consider hosting an event such as an annual awards banquet to honor officers who are going the extra mile to respond compassionately to youth in crisis; and
- ◆ Emphasize that crisis intervention programs for youth provide officers with added resources and skills to do their jobs better; increases officer safety; reduces the use of force; and minimizes the trauma to all involved when an individual experiences a psychiatric crisis.

Families, schools, and communities are interested in implementing programs that effectively respond to youth experiencing a mental health crisis. NAMI has developed a guide titled, “**Supporting Schools and Communities in Breaking the Prison Pipeline: A Guide to Emerging and Promising Crisis Intervention Programs for Youth**,” that outlines the crisis intervention programs for youth that have been developed. The guide also provides detailed information on how NAMI leaders can help bring these programs into their schools and communities, and provides further resources to help family advocates. The guide can be downloaded at www.nami.org/caac. For more information on NAMI’s work to promote crisis intervention programs for youth, please contact Dana Markey (danac@nami.org/703-600-1117).

Please join us in promoting crisis intervention programs for youth in your schools and communities. Together we can help ensure that youth experiencing a mental health crisis are linked with services and supports rather than driven into the juvenile justice system.