Law Enforcement Advocacy: Promoting Crisis Intervention Programs for Youth In Schools and Communities

Law enforcement officers assigned to schools are uniquely positioned to advocate for crisis intervention programs that respond to the needs of youth experiencing a psychiatric crisis. Respected by both school administrators and their superiors in law enforcement, School Resource Officers (SROs) and other school-based law enforcement officers can be real catalysts for change.

Law enforcement agencies across the country have trained officers for Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT). The CIT model is a dynamic collaboration of law enforcement and community organizations committed to ensuring that individuals with mental health treatment needs are referred to 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.

The CIT model was developed for adults, but it has recently been adapted for youth in school and in the community.

Advocating for Crisis Intervention Programs for Youth within the Law Enforcement Agency

Talk with an agency's commanding officer about why crisis intervention programs for youth are important, include these key points:

- Crisis intervention programs for youth improve safety and help prevent injuries to officers, youth, and bystanders.
- Crisis intervention programs for youth use a community policing model that helps prevent criminal activity by linking youth with mental health services and supports, and ultimately helps to minimize future contact with law enforcement and the juvenile justice system.
- Crisis intervention programs for youth promise to reduce the number of youth with mental health treatment needs who are arrested and rearrested.
- Crisis intervention programs for youth improve coordination with mental health services, reducing the time officers spend on calls involving individuals experiencing a psychiatric crisis.

Advocating for Crisis Intervention Programs for Youth with School Administrators

- Find school-based allies that will join your advocacy efforts, including social workers, counselors, psychologists, the PTA, and family advocacy groups.
- Talk with school administrators, Superintendents, and/or School Board members about the value of linking students with mental health treatment needs with services and supports, including improved classroom behavior, reduced serious student conflicts, a safer and more positive environment, and improved student functional and academic performance.
- Emphasize that crisis intervention programs for youth are not designed to diagnose or "label" students; rather they help officers to link youth with the support they need to succeed behaviorally and academically in school.
- For officers trained in adult CIT, share your positive experiences with the program and the skills you have developed that help you to better serve the community.

Once SROs and other officers receive specialized training and can better recognize a student who may be experiencing a psychiatric crisis, they are better positioned to notify school administrators about concerns related to specific students. They may also become valuable members of the team developing an effective Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for students that they regularly interact with.

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 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.