

Comment

SHARED CONCERNS: FAMILY MEMBERS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

By Carole Ann Jazbec, NAMI Coordinator and Family Member

I made an observation I'd like to pass on to our NAMI of Lake County families while attending the first three day Crisis Intervention Team Training for law enforcement at Lakeland Community College on October 12th, 13th, and 14th (CIT stands for Crisis Intervention Team and is a community based collaboration of law enforcement, mental health providers, local universities and NAMI to train law enforcement officers to handle incidents involving persons suffering from mental illness.)

Throughout the training officers expressed **exactly** some of the same frustrations and concerns for mentally ill persons they encounter on crisis calls that family members and caregivers have. They wanted answers to common problems such as ... does this person need to be hospitalized? How do I know if they are off their meds? What alternatives are there to hospitalization when a person is showing symptoms of the illness but are not being harmful to themselves or anyone else? Can I make a call without violating anyone's privacy to inform or tip the doctor or mental health professional of a particular person's behavior to inform them of what happened in the event there is no reason to arrest or "pink slip" them? Is there a way to calm a person down while they are delusional and hearing voices?

These officers **care** about leaving a person in a confused or disoriented

state... they asked many questions relating to the persons inappropriate behavior and thought pattern, and were eager to learn appropriate responses and techniques when encountering a person who is delusional, but not breaking the law.

All these issues and more were covered during the training with the bottom line being that 38 officers came away more informed as to **how** they can get the person in crisis the help they need.

Officers learned during CIT training, the same as family members learn during Family-to-Family, that the same brain which is causing the illness is the same brain deciding on the need for treatment, and there are techniques to be used in getting one in for treatment and techniques that can be used to keep one from escalating into a state where they and others may not be safe.

Officers said that one of the most effective things about the training was "getting information on why a person (with mental illness) acts they way they do", and that "hearing from people who have experienced mental illness at work, in their own life, or family" was most helpful and informative". Another officer commented, "I am glad to see Lake County making this class available to all departments, the classes provided useful information on a topic that was not covered very well in Police Academy."

As family members, we all know too well the dilemmas faced when our loved one becomes psychotic ... law enforcement is most often the first contact we make in trying to get help for our loved one ... therefore law

enforcement plays a critical role in the process of keeping one in crisis out of the criminal justice system and getting them into the mental health system of care. We all know that jail is not a therapeutic environment ... and this is the beauty of CIT, taking what can be an adversarial relationship between law enforcement, the ill person and the family and turning it into a connatural situation, beneficial for all concerned and therapeutic for the ill person...

The Saturday afternoon following completion of the training, I ran into one of the police officers at Starbucks who had participated in the training. (It was great, he bought me a Latte!) Both he and another Officer from the same department had in just 2 days already put to use some of the techniques they acquired during training. His excitement I must say was very exhilarating.

Both persons they were assisting were previously known to them; both officers felt they kept the persons from escalating; both officers were able to get the persons to talk about their illness and medications; one person agreed willingly to allow the officer to escort them to the hospital; the other person thanked the officer for talking to them, said they would call their doctor, and call about a support group, and admitted a lot of their problems were a result of not taking their meds.

We will be following up with the trained officers and will report on their “success” stories in future issues.

Editors Note: If you have something you'd like to share with other NAMI families, please send your story or comments to: NAMI of Lake County, 5930 Heisley Rd., Mentor, Ohio 44060. If you wish, your confidentiality will be maintained.