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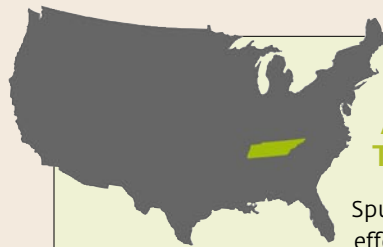
Take Action

ONCE ADVOCATES HAVE FAMILIARIZED themselves with the issue and begun to understand the interests of their partners in the criminal justice and mental health systems, there are a variety of concrete strategies that they can undertake to spearhead reform. Each of these strategies involves partnering with the criminal justice and mental health systems in order to translate the passion of advocacy into the reality of systems change.

Many advocates have used multiple strategies at once, and the options described in this section are not meant to be mutually exclusive. Rather, they are tools that can be adapted and combined in a manner appropriate to a given community, as shown by the examples included below.

Document the problem

Many successful advocacy initiatives have begun with careful analyses of the scope of the problem in a particular community. Advocates on their own, or with the help of local and state agencies, can document the frequency of contact between law enforcement and people with mental illness, the prevalence of mental illness in the local jail, or some other aspect of the problem. Concrete statistics can often lead to important policy or staffing changes that improve services and begin to address the root causes of the problem.



EXAMPLE:
Mental Health Association of Tennessee

Spurred by a powerful advocacy effort, the Tennessee Department of Mental Health commissioned a study of the prevalence of mental illness in local jails. This study led to funding in every county jail for a mental health liaison responsible for screening and diverting appropriate individuals from jail into the community.

Engage the media

Sustained interest by the media in this issue can be a very effective means of getting the attention of policymakers and practitioners. Few things are more powerful instigators of change than hard-hitting media reports. Advocates should reach out to local newspapers, radio stations, or other outlets, especially to reporters who have shown interest in mental health or criminal justice issues, and encourage them to chronicle the extent of the problem. The right story may be enough to spur dialogue or even action among key criminal justice and mental health officials. Similarly, the press can be an ally in lauding the accomplishments of new programs that address the problem,



EXAMPLE:
NAMI Kansas City

Among its many efforts related to criminal justice issues, NAMI Kansas City, along with its partners in the criminal justice community, has developed a media package to promote its work related to CIT and mental health courts. Because of their proactive, professional effort, state media have come to trust Kansas City NAMI and now turn to them for information about a variety of issues related to mental health policy.

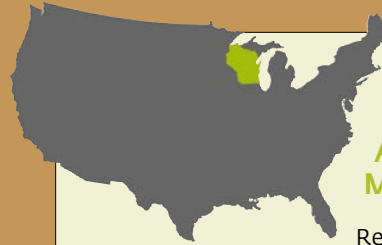
helping to ensure that those programs remain well-funded. (For more information, see “Working With the Media” in the supplemental resources section.)





In-Kind Contributions

One of the best ways for advocates to demonstrate their commitment to collaboration, and to alleviate the cost of new initiatives, is to offer their own services. The most common in-kind donation is for consumers of mental health services, family members, or mental health professionals to serve as trainers for criminal justice staff.

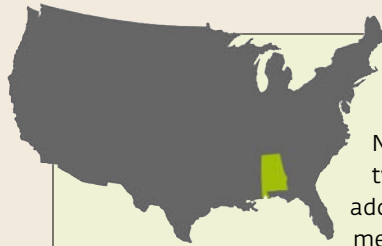


EXAMPLE:
**NAMI Wisconsin
and Mental Health
Association of
Milwaukee County, WI**

Recognizing the need for increased judicial education about mental illness, NAMI Wisconsin teamed with the Mental Health Association of Milwaukee County to present at the state's annual judicial training conference. The advocates convened a panel of two psychiatrists, a defense attorney, a prosecutor, and an advocate to speak to judges on a range of issues related to mental illness in the courts.

Hold a local or statewide forum

Conferences, public meetings, or other forums can be important first steps in engaging policymakers on the issue of people with mental illness in the criminal justice system. Such events should bring together a wide array of stakeholders and provide plenty of opportunity for discussion.



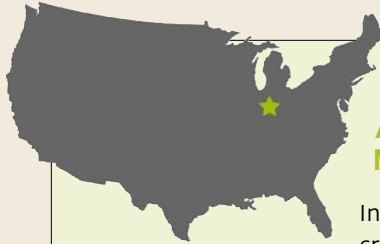
EXAMPLE:
NAMI Alabama

NAMI Alabama has convened two statewide conferences to address the criminal justice and mental health issues. The conferences combined nationally known speakers with county-based breakout groups during which attendees planned advocacy efforts for their communities. As a result of the conferences, eight criminal justice/mental health task forces were established across the state, each with a different, locally determined focus.



Form a community-wide coalition

To address the complex issues at the intersection of the criminal justice, mental health, and substance abuse treatment systems, some advocates have helped to create community-wide coalitions. Such groups typically bring together consumers of mental health services and family members with representatives of law enforcement, the courts, adult and juvenile corrections, the mental health and substance abuse treatment systems, elected officials, and other relevant stakeholders. Coalitions can be important vehicles to raise awareness of the problem, prioritize solutions, and ensure ongoing coordination and commitment. By engaging community groups that represent members of minority communities, they can also help ensure that stakeholders share a regard for and attention to the dynamics of cultural difference. They also provide advocates with the



EXAMPLE:
Mental Health Association in Marion County, Indiana

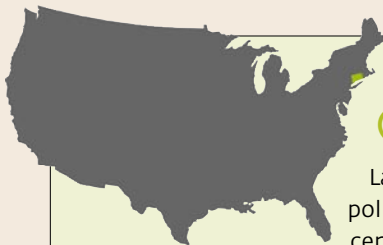
In 1994, after concern from criminal justice officials about the high rates of mental illness in their system, staff of the Mental Health Association (MHA) in Marion County convened a group of local judges, prosecutors, jail staff, and service providers to talk about the problem. Over the course of many meetings, the stakeholders planned a diversion program targeting defendants with mental illness charged with misdemeanors. To alleviate concerns among court officials about maintaining contact with diverted defendants, MHA agreed to monitor participants' compliance. The planning group then evolved into a weekly roundtable in which all relevant parties discuss cases. The trust and communication between service providers, MHA staff, community corrections personnel, the prosecutor, and the public defender remains essential for the program's smooth functioning.

opportunity to impact policy decisions on a regular basis.

Launch a campaign or organization

Some advocates have seen the need in their communities to launch a comprehensive campaign or a new organization to address criminal justice issues. Such

dedicated efforts can offer a powerful locus of energy and expertise to urge reform in multiple communities.



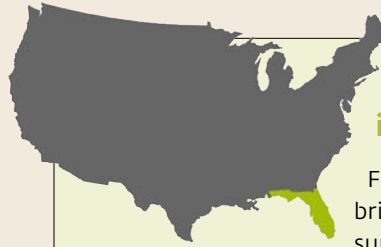
EXAMPLE:
Connecticut Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement, Inc. (CABLE)

Launched in 2003, CABLE is a grassroots organization of community members and police officers dedicated to enhancing officer and community safety. One of CABLE's central goals is to build collaboration between law enforcement and community organizations, particularly mental health providers. CABLE helps local police departments develop partnerships with their local mental health providers, helps to coordinate CIT training across the state, and provides other support services to police departments. CABLE's promotion of CIT is coordinated with Connecticut NAMI.



Build advocacy alliances with criminal justice partners

Mental health advocates are increasingly teaming up with representatives from the criminal justice and mental health system to offer a unified voice on the need to improve mental health services and address the problem of mental illness in the criminal justice system. These broad-based coalitions can add significant power to advocates' efforts.



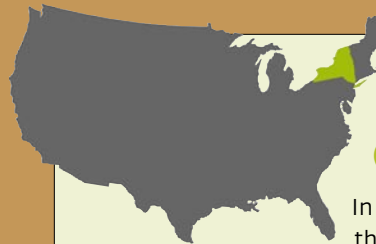
EXAMPLE:
**Florida Partners
in Crisis**

Florida Partners in Crisis (PIC) brings together advocates, consumers of mental health services, judges, law enforcement and corrections officers, prosecutors and public defenders, service providers, hospital administrators, and family members to advocate for increased funding and resources for the community mental health and substance abuse treatment systems, and to promote specific policy issues related to this population. One of the motivating forces behind its creation was the growing concern of criminal justice professionals about the overrepresentation of people with mental illness in the criminal justice system. PIC leaders have met with the Governor, the Speaker of the House, and the Senate President.



Peer and Family Support Services

Providing peer and family support is a core activity for many advocates, and some advocacy organizations have begun to focus those efforts on the families of individuals who have been arrested or incarcerated. That includes education for family members about how to help their loved ones avoid criminal justice involvement and how to assist if they are arrested or incarcerated. Similarly, peer services to help individuals leaving prison and jail are increasingly being seen as essential to their successful reintegration.



EXAMPLE:
**Howie T. Harp
Advocacy Center
(New York)**

In 2000, at the request of the New York State Department of Corrections, the Howie T. Harp Advocacy Center launched the STARR program (Steps To A Renewed Reality), which offers employment training and placement assistance to individuals with mental illness who have criminal histories. Howie T. Harp is operated entirely by individuals with mental illness, and half of the participants in the STARR Program receive training to become peer specialists.

