

CRIMINAL JUSTICE RESOURCES

In many ways, jails and prisons have become substitute facilities for people with mental illness. If your loved one is currently in a correctional institution, the following information may improve their care and/or transition back into the community. *Please contact NAMI Wisconsin for more in-depth information on this topic, including ways to advocate to improve this system!*



Tips FOR ADVOCATING IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

LOCATE YOUR LOVED ONE. To locate a loved one in a WI prison, call the WI Dept. of Corrections Central Records Office at (608) 240-3750 or go to offender.doc.state.wi.us/lop. You will need the person's full name and date of birth. To confirm that a loved one is in jail, call your county sheriff's department. You can find a sheriff's office directory at wsdsa.org; (715) 723-7173

IDENTIFY YOUR LOVED ONE'S PROVIDERS. Ask your loved one for the name of the mental health and medical providers they are assigned to. With this information, you will know that your loved one knows who to contact for help. This will also prevent the stress of trying to identify these key people in a crisis.

SHARE IMPORTANT INFO with the mental health and medical staff at the facility **AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**. Do not wait until your loved one is in a crisis to share important mental health information. Do not assume that staff are aware of any outside mental health records. For example, you might say:

"I know you cannot share information with me due to privacy laws but I would like to share important information with you. My loved one lives with a mental illness called [diagnosis] and they take [medications, dosage and frequency if possible]. You can reach their community doctor at [phone number]. They have a history of suicide attempts [if applicable]. Could you please ask them to sign a release so you can speak to me about their mental health care? Would it be possible to follow up with you on these issues? If so, when is a good time? Thank you very much for your time."

SECURE AN INFORMATION RELEASE. Due to medical privacy laws, mental health staff cannot share information with family members unless your loved one signs a form authorizing them to speak with you. Even if staff want to share information with you, they cannot due to federal laws outside of their control. To avoid this problem, request that mental health staff offer your loved one an information release so that you can speak freely with their providers. Encourage your loved one to request an information release.

ADVOCATE FOR EFFECTIVE RELEASE PLANNING

Identify pre-release social worker and be aware of timing. Around 6 months before release, inmates of WI prisons are assigned to a pre-release social worker. Ask your loved one to give you the name of their pre-release social worker. This person probably does not work in the Psychological Services Unit (“PSU”) but rather in Social Services. Follow up again around 3 months before release to discuss the release “game plan.”

Request that important services and supports be part of the pre-release planning conversation: medications, case management services, therapy, housing, health insurance and other benefits.

Identify resources for successful re-entry into the community. **FAIR SHAKE** (statewide), fairshake.net,

(608) 634-6363 • **INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS** (statewide), contact information on page 82 • **MADISON URBAN MINISTRY** (Madison area), emum.org; (608) 256-0906 • **THE DEMETER FOUNDATION** (Madison area), thedemeterfoundation.org; (608) 298-3563 • **VOICES BEYOND BARS** (Madison area), leadership development and peer support for formerly incarcerated people (608) 270-9711 • **INFALLIBLE HELPING HANDS** (Milwaukee area), infalliblehelpinghands.org; (414) 219-9046 • **COMMUNITY CIRCLES OF SUPPORT** (serves Appleton, Neenah-Menasha, Oshkosh, Fond du Lac, Green Bay and Manitowoc), circles-of-support.org; (877) 490-3120

IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT ABUSE, NEGLECT OR OTHER CIVIL RIGHTS VIOLATION, contact Disability Rights Wisconsin; disabilityrightswi.org; (800) 928-8778

BE AWARE OF THE SYSTEM'S CURRENT LIMITATIONS. The Wisconsin Department of Correction's mental health system is built upon a classification system where inmates' mental health issues are given the following codes:

MH-0 (people with no or very minimal mental health treatment history, not seen routinely by mental health staff) • **MH-1** (people with a current mental health diagnosis or substantial mental health history, seen once every 6 months at a minimum) • **MH-2** (people diagnosed with serious mental illnesses, seen once every 3 months at a minimum) • Inmates in any category can send a written request for additional visits with mental health staff or to be seen for a mental health crisis.

Inmates also have very little choice in providers due to extreme staff shortages. Encourage your loved one to work with their assigned provider. With a release of information, you can talk with the provider to better support your loved one's therapeutic relationship with their assigned clinician.