



ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

VALUE

We'd all like to believe that if we're facing challenges, or even crisis, our community will step up and help us through, with respect and compassion. That's how community should work – we share responsibility for each other and come together to face challenges. It's particularly important to remember this vision of community when considering issues that arise around mental health concerns. Individuals experiencing mental health challenges and crises need their communities to work with them on solutions. They want what we all want: to be met with support, respect, and compassion.

PROBLEM

But too often, people are first met by police. We know that the criminal justice system is too often used as a cure-all for social problems that are better suited to social services and public health responses. Criminalization is routinely used in responding to mental health matters. Because of inadequate mental health structures, arrest and jail are at times used to restrain people with mental health issues when medical treatment is actually needed.

SOLUTION

We need solutions that uphold our values and treat people how we all would want to be treated. That can happen best through increased health services. For cases when police do become involved police departments should train officers how to interact with and assist people experiencing mental health conditions. The goal should be to foster a culture of respect for human dignity and to encourage respect for community members through de-escalation training, and trainings administered by individuals who are most directly impacted. Within the department, there should be more intensive training of law enforcement agents who will serve as in-house experts and primary contact people when community members are coping with concerns relating to mental health.

ACTION

Attend community forums on policing and urge decision-makers to adopt police training that focuses on respectful and effective interaction around mental health issues.