

*Just for You!***When Mental Health Issues Result in Legal Trouble**

Unfortunately, mental health challenges can lead individuals to become involved in either the civil or criminal legal systems. Nationwide, jails and prisons are the largest provider of mental health services in the United States. Locally, 25% of inmates at the Albemarle Charlottesville Regional Jail meet the screening criteria for serious mental illness. The 911 call center that serves the city of Charlottesville, Albemarle County, and UVA receives over 1,000 mental health related calls each year.

If you are concerned that you or someone you care about is at risk for becoming involved in the legal system due to mental health issues, keep the following suggestions in mind:



- **Complete a Psychiatric Advance Directive and keep it with you** so in the event of a crisis law enforcement officers and other first responders can best know how to assist you and know what members of your support team to call. Information about psychiatric advance directives can be found at: virginiaadvancedirectives.org
- In the event of a crisis, **request a CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) officer** respond to the call. CIT officers have special training in de-escalation techniques and appreciate the unique needs of individuals with mental health challenges. Both the city of Charlottesville and Albemarle County have CIT officers on staff.
- **Contact Partner for Mental Health** to discuss how a Navigator can help you or your loved one find and coordinate legal representation and mental health and/or substance abuse treatment services.

Client Profile: "Sarah"

Sarah is married and a mother of two young children with a graduate degree and successful career in Charlottesville. After the birth of her youngest child 18 months ago she experienced severe post-partum depression and anxiety. She had daily panic attacks and intrusive thoughts.

Her depression and anxiety worsened and she began acting erratically, including compulsively shoplifting items she could easily afford and for which she had no need. She was eventually arrested and charged with felony shoplifting.

Sarah came to Partner for Mental Health feeling scared and alone. Her Partner for Mental Health Navigator was able to quickly coordinate her legal representation as well as her intensive mental health care. At Sarah's request, Partner for Mental Health advocated on her behalf with the Commonwealth's Attorney and her employer, resulting in reduced jail time and full reinstatement at her job.

Today Sarah is enjoying new found health and wellness. She says, "the commitment and responsiveness [provided to me by Partner for Mental Health] made me feel really supported. It was the first glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel."

If you or someone you love is experiencing involvement in the civil or criminal legal system, Partner for Mental Health can help. **Please call us at (434) 977-4673 for assistance navigating the local legal and mental health care systems.** Partner for Mental Health can also help you write your own legally binding Psychiatric Advance Directive and help you develop an action plan designed to prevent incarceration and hospitalization.

Partner for Mental Health Mental Health and the Legal System

Partner for Mental Health is committed to helping people with mental health challenges live healthy and fulfilled lives in their home communities. When that isn't possible, we are dedicated to ensuring their rights and dignity are respected and upheld and that their needs are understood. To this end, on March 29, **we partnered with the Charlottesville/Albemarle Bar Association to provide a continuing legal education course for area attorneys** that explained the civil commitment process, examined the civil rights implications of involuntary treatment, and discussed the benefits of and options for community-based interventions. 30 lawyers, both defense attorneys and prosecutors, attended the CLE that was taught by Anna Mendez, Partner for Mental Health Executive Director, Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Nina-Alice Antony, Charlottesville's Senior Special Justice for Civil Commitments, Raymond Clarke and Avnel Coates, Chief Magistrate of the 16th Judicial District.



Sue Klebold at the Festival of the Book

To raise awareness about what can happen when the legal system fails to accurately identify and address mental health concerns, **Partner for Mental Health hosted author Sue Klebold at this year's Virginia Festival of the Book.** Her son, Dylan, was one of the Columbine High School shooters and less than a year before the shooting had been court-ordered to participate in

a diversion program. As Ms. Klebold related in her book, and spoke about in her presentation, the court graduated him from the program early with glowing praise and reassurance to his parents that he was a "good kid". We are grateful for Ms. Klebold's willingness to provide the perspective as a mother of a person with unidentified mental illness as it inevitability opened her life and family to public scrutiny. Our Festival of the Book event was attended by more than 300 people, including Senator Creigh Deeds, Virginia's leading proponent of mental health care reform in the General Assembly.

Client Profile: "Joe"

Joe is a life-long Charlottesville resident. He found Partner for Mental Health after serving a prison sentence. Mental illness and severe childhood trauma were significant mitigating factors in his offense. When he came to Partner for Mental Health he was receiving no mental health treatment, was sleeping on the streets, and had no income.

Joe's Partner for Mental Health Navigator helped him obtain disability benefits, find housing and rental assistance, and coordinated his mental and physical health care treatment. Joe also has a brain injury sustained while incarcerated that causes a seizure disorder.

Joe has ongoing obligations to the justice system. His Navigator coordinates his work with District 9 Probation, OAR, and his lawyer. She educates his social service providers, lawyers, and the Court on the ramifications of his mental illness and brain injury and advocates on his behalf for continued opportunities for comprehensive mental health treatment.

Joe's challenges aren't over. Partner for Mental Health will continue to insist the justice system treat him with dignity and respect and that access to treatment is offered to him at each step in the rest of his journey through the criminal justice system.

Partner for Mental Health's work in the legal system is supported by a generous grant from the **BAMA Works Fund** of the Dave Matthews Band. We are also grateful for the funding provided by the **University of Virginia Health System, Wells Fargo Private Bank, and the Institute for Law, Psychiatry, and Public Policy** that enabled us to bring Ms. Klebold to Charlottesville. **Senator Creigh Deeds and Dr. Richard Bonnie** gave generously of their time and we are grateful for their support of our work and mission.

Noteworthy News

Mental Health Legislation in the 2017 Virginia General Assembly

Partner for Mental Health has been an affiliate of Mental Health America (MHA) since 1947. Just as Mental Health America advocates for mental health issues at the federal level, Partner for Mental Health works to advance mental health legislation at the Virginia General Assembly. We serve as the chairing organization for Mental Health America's statewide Policy Committee, charged with defining MHA's position on legislation and developing the list of advocacy priorities in Virginia.

In her role as the Policy Committee Chairperson, Partner for Mental Health's Executive Director, Anna Mendez, has been appointed to the workgroup formed by passage of **HB1462** and **tasked with developing protocols for alternative transportation for involuntarily hospitalizations**. Currently, individuals in crisis are taken to the hospital by armed and uniformed police officers, in handcuffs, in the back of marked cars. This system criminalizes mental illness, perpetuates prejudice and discrimination, and is often unnecessary, clinically inappropriate, and traumatizing. The workgroup has been appointed by the General Assembly to develop an alternative system that reflects the principles of trauma informed care and prioritizes safety.



Anna is also serving in an advisory capacity to the **HB1784 workgroup, appointed by the General Assembly and tasked with developing a system for providing mental health discharge planning services to all individuals with mental illness being released from any jail in Virginia**. This could have great benefits for the Charlottesville area where a recent study discovered that 75% of inmates with serious mental illness do not receive any mental health care after being released from the Charlottesville Albemarle Regional Jail.

Other mental health legislation passed by the 2017 General Assembly included expanding the services of the public mental health system, facilitating mental health services provided via telemedicine technology, and establishing peer support as a Medicaid reimbursable service.

Client Profile: "Sean"

Sean was referred to Partner for Mental Health by Charlottesville's wintertime homeless shelter. Shelter staff recognized that Sean had unmet mental health needs and was self-medicating with alcohol. In March 2017 Sean began working with his Partner for Mental Health Navigator in earnest.

She discovered he had been arrested 74 times since 2016 on charges directly related to his alcoholism and bipolar disorder. He has an upcoming court date for unresolved charges and one of his bond conditions is that he abstain from alcohol.

His Navigator immediately began coordinating with his court-appointed attorney, his pre-trial supervisor, and the local public mental health authority to get him in-patient treatment where his withdrawal from alcohol can be medically supervised and his recovery work can begin.

Because of the advocacy and service coordination of his Navigator, Sean is optimistic he will be able to attend long term in-patient treatment prior to his court appearance. His Navigator is working with his family to create a healthy and safe living arrangement for him once he returns from treatment to help support his recovery and sobriety.

For more information about advocating for mental health care services in Virginia, please **contact Anna Mendez at anna@partnerformentalhealth.org or (434) 977-4673**. To find out who your state representatives are, you can use the website: <http://whosmy.viriniageneralassembly.gov/>