

Building partnership between mental health professionals and a local patient advocacy group to improve care for incarcerated people with serious mental illness



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Background

- Despite efforts to reduce the criminalization of people with serious mental illness (SMI), individuals with SMI remain overrepresented in the criminal justice system.
- Personal experiences of family members involved with incarcerated individuals with SMI, together with the professional knowledge of mental health professionals, can create a powerful collective voice for policy change.

Method

- The Correctional Psychiatry Working Group formed within the MGH Schizophrenia Clinical and Research Program connected with a local grassroots patient advocacy group for incarcerated individuals, “Families and Friends of the Mentally Ill (FFMI).”
- An initial Zoom meeting was held with the FFMI Steering Committee to understand their experiences and needs in order to improve the legal and mental health systems.

Academic-Community Partnership

Mental Health Professionals

First-hand knowledge

Expertise in mental health & legal systems

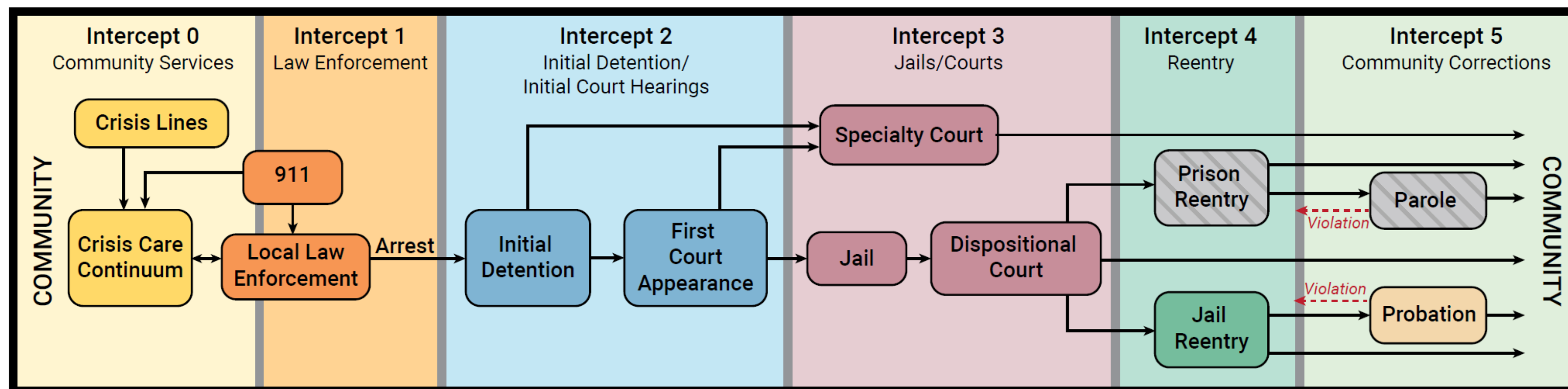
Families and Friends of the Mentally Ill

Personal Experiences

Community ties to law makers & diverse organizations

Result Four priority areas were identified across the sequential intercept model:

1. Equipping mental health centers with toolkits to prevent incarceration of their patients
2. Improving communication processes by which mental health clinicians in jail engage family members
3. Scaling up forensic peer support services within jails
4. Delivering resources and psychoeducation to caregivers to assist with navigating the legal system. (across all intercepts)



Source: Abreu et al., 2017.

Conclusion

- Collaborative advocacy can occur when combining the lived experiences and community ties of FFMI with expert knowledge of the Correctional Psychiatry Working Group.
- Ongoing workshops will help develop impactful interventions in advocacy, peer support, improved mental health treatment, education, resources, and policy change for a local population with SMI enmeshed within the correctional system.

References

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