

Schizophrenia Society of Ontario Mission:

To improve the quality of life for those affected by schizophrenia & psychosis through education, support programs, public policy & research.

Justice and Mental Health Program Mandate:

To support families of accused and at risk persons with mental illness and maximize their capacity to promote change in mental health and justice.

The Justice and Mental Health (JAMH) Program was established to meet the needs of families of persons with mental illness who have come into contact with the law. The pillars of the JAMH program are *support, education, advocacy, and partnership.*

Support

The cornerstone of JAMH's support function is ANCRSS (Advocates for the Not Criminally Responsible Schizophrenia Sufferers), an e-mail-based peer support group initiated by families for families. This confidential network provides province-wide peer support for people whose family member is currently or was at one time in the criminal justice or forensic mental health systems. Established in 2001, ANCRSS provides a safe space where families can share their stories and gain from collective experiences and knowledge exchange. Members benefit from having an understanding, empathetic network to help them deal with challenging situations and social stigma.

In addition to group and peer support, the JAMH program also provides individual support services. Our Family Support Worker is available to provide both crisis support and ongoing counselling to families who have been impacted by their loved one's experience in the justice system. Family members at any point in the criminal justice process can contact JAMH's Family Support Worker to obtain counselling support, information on local services, or guidance on the justice process and the mental health system.

Education

The JAMH program at the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario is a central access point for education and information on the mental health and justice systems. Common information needs such as how to navigate these systems, legal and medical terminology, individual and family rights, and how to interpret legislation are addressed in an accessible fashion. This information is currently available via our support programs or by contacting our office; online access and print resources will be available shortly.

Education for professionals who encounter people with mental illness in the context of the law is also a priority for the JAMH program. We provide training and educational resources on a variety of topics in mental health and justice, including the role of families in crisis intervention.

Advocacy

The JAMH program participates in both personal and system-level advocacy initiatives. At the personal level, JAMH helps families to advocate for their loved one throughout their involvement with the criminal justice and forensic mental health systems. Advocacy support helps empower families to ensure that their loved one's mental health needs are recognized and that they have access to the necessary services and supports.

At the system level, JAMH advocates for much needed changes in mental health and criminal justice policy, as informed by the family experience. The JAMH program is committed to advocating for public policies that prevent the criminalization of people with mental illness and ensure that for those going through the justice process, recovery is the primary objective.

Partnership

As one of many stakeholders in justice and mental health, the JAMH program is grounded in a collaborative approach. It is through working in partnership both with organizations within its sector and with professionals in other sectors that JAMH can create positive system change. Partnerships are also recognized as a way of opening the lines of communication between organizations and stakeholders, which in turn improves the continuum of services for both individuals and families.