



Treatment Advocacy Center Briefing Paper

Consequences reduced – But not in New Jersey

Mark and Kathy Katsnelson, along with countless New Jersey families who are struggling to get treatment for their loved ones suffering from severe mental illnesses, are leading the effort to reform the state's inadequate mental health law. The Katsnelsons recognized the deficiency in New Jersey's law after the death of their 11-year old son Gregory, at the hands of a young man with an untreated mental illness. They and other families know that New Jersey needs assisted outpatient treatment to keep those with an untreated mental illness who are too ill to know they need help from becoming trapped in a revolving door of short-term hospitalizations, incarcerations, victimization, and violence.

You only have to pick up a newspaper to confirm that such reform is long overdue. Newspaper accounts provide stark evidence of the tragedies resulting from New Jersey's outdated law. Most other state laws allow for assisted outpatient treatment to reduce hospitalization, homelessness, arrests, incarceration, harmful behavior and victimization (42 other states already have assisted outpatient treatment laws). But in New Jersey, only individuals willing and able to access treatment voluntarily can get service in the community. The result is, unfortunately, all-too predictable...

Arrests reduced - But not in New Jersey

IN NEW YORK 83% fewer individuals were arrested (Kendra's Law statistics).

IN NORTH CAROLINA Arrests reduced by 74% (Duke Studies).

IN NEW JERSEY Elio Pintado had been committed to hospitals at least three times, but each time he stopped taking his medication his family had to wait until he became "dangerous." Pintado, 30, now faces 17 criminal charges stemming from a March 12, 2004 incident in which he is accused of holding two employees of a limousine company hostage in Roselle Park, NJ and claiming he had a bomb-rigged suitcase. After a 10-hour standoff, a SWAT team stormed the building and found there was no bomb. Pintado has bipolar disorder and was not taking medication. He had a prior history of minor offenses. After hearing of the hostage situation, a Chatham police officer who arrested Pintado for disorderly conduct in 2002 said he "wasn't surprised in the least. I could have forecast this." (*New York Times*, Mar. 13, 2004; *Star Ledger*, Mar. 13 and Nov. 9, 2004; *Bergen County Record*, Mar. 13, 2004; WNBC.com, Mar. 16, 2004)

Incarceration reduced - But not in New Jersey

IN NEW YORK 87% fewer individuals experienced incarceration (Kendra's Law statistics).

IN NEW JERSEY Miklos Nagy was in Passaic County Jail on January 15, 2002 when he suffered a heart attack and died at Paterson hospital. He had threatened suicide and was put in restraints after a manic episode a few days before his death. Nagy had been incarcerated since the previous Thursday, when police arrested him for allegedly attacking his mother with pepper spray. Nagy's mother said her son had suffered from manic depression for years, and had a history of medication non-adherence. Nagy's mother said that despite the attack, she begged officials not to incarcerate him. "I told the police, 'He's a sick man. He needs hospitalization, not jail,'" she said. (*The Record*, Jan. 17, 2002.)

Homelessness reduced - But not in New Jersey

IN NEW YORK 74% fewer individuals experienced episodes of homelessness (Kendra's Law statistics).

IN NEW JERSEY As many as 11,000 people in New Jersey who suffer from mental illness are homeless, according to estimates by the Department of Human Services. The quality of life for the mentally ill homeless is abysmal. Valerie Fox, who has schizophrenia and spent two years in the 1980s living on the streets, said she wished someone had forced her to get back on her medication. "There was absolutely no good reason for me to be out there, except for the mental illness. I have license to say this, because I've lived it," Fox said. (*Asbury Park Press*, July 24, 2000, *Star Ledger*, Oct. 26, 2004).

Violent episodes reduced - But not in New Jersey

IN NEW YORK 47% fewer recipients physically harmed others (Kendra's Law statistics).

IN NORTH CAROLINA Violence reduced up to 50% (Duke Studies).

IN NEW JERSEY On October 17, 2002, Ronald Pituch, 27, bludgeoned his 56-year-old mother to death because she refused to buy him a pack of cigarettes. He then tied up his niece and assaulted an elderly woman he passed in his neighborhood. He later encountered 11-year old Gregory Katsnelson on his bike and stabbed him with a kitchen knife. Gregory's body was found in a shallow pond near the bike trail behind his Evesham, NJ home. Pituch was not taking medication for schizophrenia and had become so verbally abusive in the weeks prior to the attacks that his family wanted to have him "committed in some way to a mental-health facility." Family members say mental-health professionals assured them that Pituch was not homicidal or suicidal. Family members also said Pituch denied he was sick. (*Courier-Post* Oct. 21, 2002 & Sept. 28, 2003; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 13, 2002 & Dec. 7, 2002, *Burlington County Times*, Oct. 14, 2003).

Threats of harm to others reduced - But not in New Jersey

IN NEW YORK 43% fewer individuals made threats of physical harm to others (Kendra's Law Statistics).

IN NEW JERSEY On October 10, 2004, a 34-year-mentally ill lunged at a Mount Olive, NJ police officer with a knife and was killed while his father screamed, "Don't shoot him!" The shooting occurred moments after 72-year-old Sumandor Alli had called 911, just as he had done before whenever his son, Gregory, stopped taking his medication and acted out. This time, Alli had turned violent, stabbing his father with a blunt knife. When the patrolman arrived at the Budd Lake home, Alli charged at him, waving a knife and ignoring the officer's demands to drop it. The officer then fired three shots, killing Alli. Police had been called to the house before because of his erratic behavior. Sumandor Alli said his son was diagnosed with schizophrenia at age 18. The month before his death, police had taken Gregory Alli to Saint Clare's Hospital for treatment. (*Newark Star-Ledger*, October 11, 2004; *Mt. Olive Chronicle*, October 13 & 20, 2004)

Medication adherence improved – But not in New Jersey

IN NEW YORK Individuals exhibiting good adherence to medication increased by 51% (Kendra's Law Statistics)

IN NEW JERSEY In May 2004, Edward Herringer, who lived in a supervised residence for people with mental illnesses in Ewing, NJ, had been off his medication and displaying symptoms for three weeks when neighbors called police because he was speaking incoherently and threatening suicide. When police arrived, he lunged at a police officer with a kitchen knife and mentioned a hand grenade. Dozens of police officers, including the New Jersey State Police SWAT Team, responded to what became a seven-hour standoff. Police evacuated about two-dozen homes in the neighborhood. No one was seriously hurt. (*Trentonian*, May 7, 2004)

Victimization reduced – But not in New Jersey

IN NORTH CAROLINA Victimization reduced 43% (Duke Studies).

IN NEW JERSEY In January 2004, 65-year-old Joel Seidel, who had a long history of mental illness, was stomped to death by a cellmate in the Camden County jail's mental health wing. His assailant, Marvin Lister, 35, an inmate with a long history of mental illness and violence, had also savagely beat another man with mental illness in 1993, while in the jail's psychiatric unit. When Mr. Seidel was released from psychiatric institutions, he refused to take his medication. Seidel's family decided against paying the \$150 bond, hoping he would receive treatment while incarcerated. (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 21, 2004; *Courier-Post*, Feb. 19 & 21, Mar. 21, 2004.)