

New York City Council

Preliminary Budget Hearing

**Committee on Mental Health, Mental
Retardation, Alcoholism, Drug Abuse and
Disability Services**

Thursday, March 11, 2010

**Testimony by Bradley Jacobs, LMSW
Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services
(CASES)**

My name is Bradley Jacobs. I am the Team Leader of a mental health alternatives to incarceration program run by CASES. I am here on behalf of the ATI Coalition, which consists of seven programs that provide alternative-to-incarceration and reentry services. The Coalition includes the Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES), Center for Community Alternatives (CCA), Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), Fortune Society, Legal Action Center (LAC), Osborne Association and Women's Prison Association (WPA).

For ten years, CASES has been serving individuals with severe and persistent mental illness involved in the criminal justice system. I appear before the Council today to thank you for your support of ATI and reentry work and ask that you continue to support our efforts.

The Need for Mental Health Programs for Court-Involved Individuals

According to the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, on any given day there are approximately 2,500 individuals with mental health problems in the City's jails. People with mental illness are over represented in our City jails and the jails constitute a vast de facto mental health institution. These justice-involved individuals face tremendous challenges. Many are turned away from community based mental health treatment and housing because of their criminal justice involvement and limited resources in the community. During the past ten years we have learned the CASES programs are:

- Cost-effective
- Reduce the time spent in jail for people with mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse disorders
- Result in lower criminal justice costs
- Do not increase public safety risks and reduce recidivism

About CASES Mental Health Programs

CASES mental health programs are aimed at ending the cycle of arrest, confinement, release, and re-arrest by providing access to adequate community treatment and support. The alternative sentences we offer are more effective than jail or prison because they link people to services that are essential to their long-term success, including mental health and substance abuse treatment, education, housing, and employment training.

CASES mental health programs include the Nathaniel Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Program, the Transitional Case Management Program, and the Nathaniel Supported Housing Program.

Nathaniel Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)
Felony ATI Program

The Nathaniel Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) program was named for a schizophrenic homeless man whose illness went untreated for 15 years as he cycled in and out of the criminal justice system. The Nathaniel ACT Program provides alternatives to incarceration (ATI) services for adults with mental illness convicted for felony crimes that are at risk of state imprisonment. The program is licensed by the NYS Office of Mental Health and serves a maximum of 68 participants at any one time. Program services include:

- Mental Health Treatment and Rehabilitation Services
- Supportive Housing Procurement

The City Council supports the ACT program's transitional apartment located in Brooklyn that provides temporary housing to five homeless male participants at any given time. The housing ensures participants do not use expensive shelter beds and have a smooth transition from jail while awaiting placement in long-term supportive housing.

Nathaniel ACT services are delivered by a mobile, multi-disciplinary mental health treatment team that includes a psychiatrist, nurses, a peer specialist, and social workers trained in substance use, family work, vocational services, supported employment, and criminal justice. The team provides treatment services in the community. Our services are citywide services because the majority of our clients are homeless on release from jail and eventually secure supportive housing in locations throughout the City. Our ACT services are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In addition to offering treatment services to the participants, CASES also provides regular updates to the Court regarding the participants' progress in the program.

In a 2006 recidivism study, we compared the arrests and convictions accumulated by Nathaniel ACT team participants following their release to the program to their own records prior to participating in the program. The study noted the following positive outcomes for Nathaniel ACT Team participants between the pre-intake arrest and post-release periods:

- An average 89% decrease in arrests;
- A 97% decline in convictions

The program also produces positive clinical outcomes

- A 60% decline in psychiatric hospitalizations;
- A 42% reduction in homelessness;
- Increased rates of participation in educational activity and employment.

Transitional Case Management Misdemeanor ATI Program

CASES mental health programs also assist adults with mental illness convicted of low-level misdemeanor crimes. In response to the fact that people with mental illness who are sentenced to very short jail stays in New York City may not receive any mental health or discharge planning services, CASES launched a program in 2004 titled EXIT. This federally-funded three-year demonstration project provided voluntary case management services to low-level offenders with mental illness. The program showed that judges sentenced 88% of mentally ill defendants to case management services, 69% of this population engaged in voluntary case management services, and that there was a corresponding reduction in recidivism for this group.

Based on its success, CASES received two-years of Bureau of Justice Assistance funding in 2007 to start our current Transitional Case Management (TCM) program. CASES has a clinical psychologist who works in Manhattan Criminal Court to identify defendants with mental illness at risk of short jail sentences. The program provides immediate community case management services and linkages delivered by a team consisting of a social work supervisor, substance abuse case manager and peer specialist to address participants' mental health and substance abuse treatment needs. The TCM program serves approximately 80 participants each year and program services support reductions in participant recidivism.

CASES provides TCM participants with numerous services:

- Court-based comprehensive mental health screening conducted by a clinical psychologist
- Service planning covering immediate needs, treatment and service needs, housing status, and community ties conducted by community case management team;
- Service referrals and escorts to appropriate mental health and substance abuse treatment services, emergency shelters, long-term housing, and vocational and educational services; and
- Ongoing case management services according to the participant's needs which bridge the 2-3 month period until the individual is placed in ongoing mental health and community case management services.

The Mayor's Office of the Criminal Coordinator and a private foundation also support the program.

Finally, CASES operates Supported Housing aimed at providing long-term scattered-site housing to 14 participants enrolled in our alternatives-to-incarceration programs. The housing is funded by the NYS Office of Mental Health and the NYC Department and Health and Mental Hygiene, and provides critical housing stability to program participants.

Once again, thank you for your ongoing support and thank you for this opportunity to testify on these important issues.