

Eve Shippens, NAMI - Buffalo

Hi! My name is Eve Shippens. I am a Buffalo Public School teacher, a mom, and I have several people in my life with mental illness, so I have many stories. I am also a member of the National Association for Mental Illness (NAMI) since 2018 and I am a family support group facilitator and teach family to family class for them.

I had a partner going through a mental health crisis about 5 years ago. He was delusional (seeing and hearing things that were not real). He also was aggressive at times. He had suicidal ideation as well. He often drank too much (self-medicating) and would walk along the river late at night at Broderick Park, where he fantasized about jumping in. He'd come home, drunk, aggressive, and would take off his clothes. I was afraid to call 911 because his drunken, erratic, and aggressive behavior, especially in a Black man, may end in his death if police were involved. I did call crisis services many times, but they only come with the police. The time he did speak with them, the officer there stood with his hand on his gun the whole time. My partner refused treatment. He did not qualify for forcible admission because he was not a direct threat to himself. He was a direct threat to me, but since he did not have a documented mental illness, I was told by Crisis Services that it was domestic violence and that I should have him incarcerated. And if he was arrested, he would not be evaluated for mental health.

My father went into psychosis at the start of the pandemic. He was admitted into ECMC for 4 weeks. When he was released, he did not stay on his meds. I called his psychiatrist about his symptoms (I did not know at the time that he was not taking his meds), his psychiatrist dismissed his symptoms and said I was not a doctor, so I couldn't gauge his symptoms. This ended in a 2nd psychosis and readmittance for 5 weeks. He was released on his own, no shoes, he no longer knew how to use his phone, and was sent home on a bus with no family consulted in the discharge plan. Luckily, he made it home.

My son's partner took a bottle of pills during an argument with my son. 911 was called and she was taken to ECMC emergency room by ambulance. Her stomach was pumped and she was held in the

emergency room overnight for observation. She was later released with not having been assessed for suicide risk by CPEP. She was released (shoeless again) in an uber to come home on her own. No one was consulted about her discharge or discharge plan. She was only 18 years old and English is her 2nd language. I don't feel her crisis would have been handled this way if she had a family present who could advocate for her.

My other son had a mental health crisis 6 years ago. He was too old for my insurance, and due to his mental illness, he was having a hard time completing what was needed for state health insurance. Since he was grown, I was not allowed to help on this. It took a full year to get him insurance. Once he did, he started going to Spectrum. No one there could assist him in getting SSI or SNAP benefits. He was forced to move home, and I supported him for 6 years while he was unable to work. If I had not been able to take him in or support him, he would have ended up homeless. There is little support for people who are not homeless yet, or severe enough to be hospitalized. It should not have to wait for that level of crisis for there to be services.

As an educated professional, I have had limited access to quality mental healthcare for any of my loved ones. We need more resources, more wrap-around services for people before a crisis happens, better communication and assistance to families/care-givers, and to remove police from 1st response crisis teams. Thank you!