

Building Stronger Crisis Response: Bridgeway Joins Union County CIT Community at Annual BBQ

Bridgeway Behavioral Health Services joined law enforcement officers, behavioral health professionals and community partners at the Union County Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) BBQ at Kean University on August 20, celebrating the relationships that help create safer, more compassionate responses for people experiencing mental health crises.

The gathering was particularly meaningful this year as the CIT community honored **Captain Abdul Williams**, Coordinator of the Union County CIT Program, ahead of his retirement. Williams has been a longtime leader and advocate for Crisis Intervention Team programs in Union County and throughout New Jersey, helping strengthen collaboration between law enforcement and the behavioral health system.

What Is CIT?

The Crisis Intervention Team, or CIT, model brings law enforcement and behavioral health professionals together to improve the way communities respond when someone is experiencing a psychiatric crisis.

New Jersey's county-based CIT program includes an intensive 40-hour certification program for law enforcement officers, behavioral health professionals and other first responders. Participants learn about mental illness, crisis recognition, de-escalation and crisis-resolution techniques, while also becoming more familiar with behavioral health programs and other community resources.

The goal is not simply better training. CIT creates relationships between the people who may encounter an individual during a crisis and the community providers who can help that person access treatment, housing, support and other services.

That partnership is central to Bridgeway's work.

Bridgeway team members **Millie Cardona**, **Nancy Schneeloch** and **Nicole Crowley** joined the celebration and connected with Williams and **Tiffany Wilson**, Senior Counsel and Director of the New Jersey Attorney General's Office of Alternative and Community Responses. Wilson leads the state office responsible for initiatives focused on improving public safety responses to behavioral health and other community needs, including ARRIVE Together.

Bridgeway's connection to CIT extends well beyond community events. **George Vessels Jr., MSW**, Housing Director for Homeless Outreach Services, was among the CIT leaders recognized during the gathering. George contributes his behavioral health and homeless outreach experience to CIT training, helping first responders better understand the

circumstances they may encounter when responding to individuals experiencing homelessness, mental illness or other complex needs.

For George and other Bridgeway professionals involved with CIT, that education can translate directly into different outcomes on the street. An officer who understands available behavioral health, housing and outreach resources has more options when encountering someone in crisis and can help create a pathway toward services rather than allowing the situation to escalate unnecessarily.

Bridgeway's **Robin Foy** of the Homeless Outreach Team also attended, even finding time to connect with one of the police therapy dogs on hand for the event.

CIT reflects an approach Bridgeway sees throughout its partnerships with law enforcement across New Jersey: public safety and behavioral health do not operate in separate worlds. When officers, clinicians, outreach professionals and community partners know one another, train together and understand the resources available, they are better positioned to respond to people with compassion, dignity and the right support.

Bridgeway congratulates Captain Abdul Williams on his retirement and thanks him for his years of leadership, partnership and commitment to improving crisis response in Union County and throughout New Jersey.

PHOTO CAPTIONS



Bridgeway's Millie Cardona, Nancy Schneeloch and Nicole Crowley with Tiffany Wilson, Director of the NJ Attorney General's Office of Alternative and Community Responses, and Captain Abdul Williams, longtime Coordinator of the Union County CIT Program.



Robin Foy of Bridgeway's Homeless Outreach Team shares a moment with a police therapy dog during the Union County CIT BBQ at Kean University.



Captain Abdul Williams is recognized for his years of CIT leadership alongside key members of the CIT community, including Bridgeway's George Vessels Jr., MSW.



Kimberly Matos, Yerlissa Nunez, Janea Clark, Jaylen Wilson, Karen Sinfleur, Natalie Quelopana, April Cistrelli