

# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

## MICA PROJECT

### 1. What Does MICA Mean?

Mentally Ill and Chemically Addicted (MICA) is a term which identifies when a person has been dually-diagnosed with a serious and persistent mental illness and a substance addiction issue. The most common serious mental illnesses include: Schizophrenia, BiPolar Disorder, SchizoAffective Disorder, and Major Depression.

### 2. Why the Enhanced Defense MICA Project?

The issue of overrepresentation of the mentally ill in the United States criminal justice system has been well documented. Those living with mental ill-

ness are more likely to be arrested, sentenced more severely and detained longer in jail than those with similar charges. In NYC, a study of individuals arrested in Brooklyn found that 18% had a serious mental illness. For those with mental illness, the trauma of being in jail and serving time may actually exacerbate their symptoms and reduce the defendant's chance of achieving successful community integration upon release. Considering these staggering numbers, the MICA Project has demonstrated a measurable way to avoid wasting resources on jails and prisons, by investing in people.

### 3. The Enhanced-Defense MICA Project Overview:

Since 2002, the Legal Aid Society's Enhanced Defense-MICA Project has provided legal and community support services to some of the most vulnerable defendants in New York City's criminal justice system. These individuals, struggling to live with symptoms related to serious mental illness and addiction problems, are often underserved and victimized while incarcerated in our jails and prisons. The MICA Project's interdisciplinary team model partners mental health attorneys with licensed clinical social

workers to address the holistic needs of each client. Since 2007, we have incorporated consumer peer advocate interns to our Queens County team to provide peer mentors to our clients.

Our main focus is to secure an alternatives-to-incarceration disposition for defendants who can be diverted from jail/prison into community based treatment. Once a defendant is receiving community treatment, our unique defense-based bridge case management approach enables us to provide 18-24 months of community social services and monitoring. This bridge case management model is based on three core values:

- Defendants in our Project are dynamic people, not cases.
- We recognize that there is a strong connection between legal problems and social problems.
- The highly stigmatized and marginalized MICA population is often poorly served by our current mental health system, putting them at high risk for "falling through the cracks."

### 4. How to Access MICA Services:

The MICA Project has a presence in the Legal Aid Society's Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens

County trial offices. For more information call the Project Director John F. Volpe at 212/577-3340.

### **A Look Back:**

- Since 2002, the MICA Project has provided legal and social work services to over 1000 consumers.
- The Project's interventions have shown to reduce client recidivism by 34%.
- Project staff have provided guidance and consultation to over 500 judges, attorneys and community providers, annually.
- The Project staff facilitates training on a variety of mental health topics, addiction, and general criminal justice issues to help others better serve those living with mental illness and addiction with criminal justice involvement.
- The Project advocates for the issues facing those living with mental illness through participation in committees, stakeholders groups and outreach to governmental agencies and CBO's.

### **Did You Know?**

- You have a right to privacy for all your psychological, psychiatric and medical information.

- You have a right to mental health, medical and medication services in NYC jails.
- If you receive mental health counseling and/or medication in NYC jails, you have a right to work with a discharge planner who should arrange for your return to community treatment.

For more information or guidance please contact: John F. Volpe, LCSW @ 212-577-3340.



The Legal Aid Society  
199 Water Street  
New York, NY 10038  
Phone: 212-577-3300  
Fax: 212-509-8432  
[www.legal-aid.org](http://www.legal-aid.org)

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