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### Specialty treatment courts have tremendous value to community

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Drug Court Coordinator

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 20.2 million adults in the U.S. have a substance use disorder. The misuse of drugs or alcohol can be a risk factor that may lead to criminal activity. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, nearly 60% of state inmates nationwide meet the criteria for drug misuse or dependence, a rate nearly 12 times that of the general adult population. Traditionally, however, the criminal justice system has attempted to prevent unlawful activity through punishment, without addressing the underlying substance use disorder that can contribute to the behavior and be a barrier to rehabilitation. As a result, traditional criminal justice interventions, such as prison tends to result in high recidivism rates – the likelihood that offenders will commit new crimes.

The Drug Court model is a non-traditional approach to criminal justice that is based on the recognition that by failing to effectively address the misuse of drugs or alcohol, people are likely to continue to engage in criminal activity, despite facing increasingly severe pun-

ishments. The Drug Court model promotes rehabilitation by providing intensive substance use disorder treatment and holds each client accountable through intensive community-based supervision. In Drug Court, offenders are required to report to the court on a regular basis to demonstrate that they are making progress toward treatment goals and are complying with the rules of probation.

Drug Court programs began in 1989 in Miami during the crack cocaine epidemic and were a novel approach to dealing with substance-related crime. Today, Drug Courts have been established nationwide and 30 years of research and evaluation have shown that this approach has a greater positive impact on substance use and recidivism than incarceration. In fact, according to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, rigorous research shows that Drug Courts reduce recidivism rates by up to 45% when compared to traditional criminal justice approaches such as jail time. In addition, Drug Courts save the community significant amounts of money. These programs enhance both the safety of the community and the rehabilitation of the offender and are perhaps the most

successful criminal justice reform to take place in the last 30 years.

What makes Drug Courts successful? There are many factors that contribute to the success of this model, including the team approach of the program, made up of members of the courts, law enforcement, recovery community, and treatment providers. Other factors contributing to success are the use of both penalties and incentives to modify a participant's behavior and the intensive community-based supervision, including drug testing two to three times per week. That said, proper assessment and treatment of substance use and mental health symptoms is critical to supporting a participant in stopping substance use and promoting a healthy, crime-free lifestyle.

Hillsborough County Superior Court has an established Drug Court in Nashua, which has been in operation since 2014. As a member organization of

the multidisciplinary Drug Court team, Greater Nashua Mental Health (GNMH) provides treatment and case management services to Drug Court participants. Therapists and case managers collaborate with the participant to address the substance misuse and other factors that are a barrier to rehabilitation. GNMH therapists have expertise in treating both substance use and mental health disorders and are committed to using evidence-based practices and approaches that are shown by research to be effective, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapies and the MATRIX Model. Our therapists also collaborate with medical providers at GNMH and in the community, to refer participants for Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), a highly effective treatment that uses medication to help not only relieve symptoms of withdrawal, but also ease cravings that contribute to ongoing substance use. Case Managers also

help participants connect with important community resources such as education, training, and housing.

Many participants admit that they initially view Drug Court as simply an opportunity to avoid prison. Fortunately, even if avoiding prison is the initial goal, participants can still be successful. When offenders are able to make significant progress toward rehabilitation, such as maintaining abstinence from drugs and alcohol, gaining employment, and living a crime-free lifestyle, they do avoid prison. But more than that, Drug Court graduates discover that recovery is possible and that they are able to assume their role as productive citizens in our community. Many times, they are reunited with children and family members lost due to the effects of their behaviors. Over time, treatment helps

participants gain sobriety, manage underlying mental health symptoms, and engage in long-term recovery. Powerful stories of lives not only regained but thriving are often heard at the graduation ceremonies of participants.

May is both National Drug Court Month and Mental Health Awareness month. GNMH is proud to recognize and celebrate the men and women who have taken the steps to work hard in treatment, be accountable to society and become positive and productive members of our community.

For more information about our Drug Court or any other GNMH programs, call 603-889-6147 or visit [www.gnmh.org](http://www.gnmh.org). If you are experiencing a mental health crisis, call our 24/7 Emergency Phone at 1-800-762-8191. Don't suffer alone. We can help, so call today.

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### Memorial Day

In recognition of the holiday, The Telegraph will not publish and Advertising offices will be closed on Monday, May 27.

Retail advertising deadlines are as follows:

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*Wishing you a safe and happy holiday.*

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