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Program helps instill hope for those facing mental illness

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NASHUA – There is still plenty of stigma surrounding mental illness and addiction, but with compassion and understanding in mind, Greater Nashua Mental Health officials are providing help to individuals suffering from both problems with their Integrated Dual Disorders Treatment (IDDT) program.

Individuals must suffer from severe mental illness and severe addiction, while be actively using drugs, to be a part of this program. Some of the services offered to clients include community outreach, in-home or office therapy, community sup-

port services, supported employment, family support and medication services.

IDDT Team Coordinator Marie Macedonia oversees this program. She said throughout the nation, a lack in the ability to assist people who are suffering from dual diagnosis is an ongoing issue. Macedonia said the traditional model was really to treat one issue separately from the other, usually sequentially, choosing to address either the individuals' mental health or their addiction. However, Macedonia also said people who are suffering from both impairments must take them on simultaneously.

"Our approach is very much based on compassion and under-

standing, because, let's face it, we still live in a society where there is a lot of stigma associated with both mental illness and addiction," Macedonia said.

Macedonia said studies show that treating both at the same time is more efficient. Macedonia also said addiction is a personal trial. Some people have more resilience, support, tools, or are just more ready to embrace their recoveries, than are others.

Since the program's launch, one individual has successfully graduated, with four others approaching completion. She got involved with the program about six months after its inception, and said for the most part,

the work involves community outreach. They try to meet clients where they are both physically, but also psychologically.

In terms of addressing mental illness within clients, IDDT deals with a lot of bipolar cases, as well as people with schizophrenia, for example.

Macedonia said some clients have so much anxiety that it hinders them from leaving their houses. They often end up drinking and using drugs to cope with the anxiety.

In terms of addiction, Macedonia said IDDT used to have mostly opiate and opioid cases. Though this is still a major issues, organizers have found that both alcohol and metham-

phetamine addiction are again rising problems.

While all clients involved with the IDDT program have this dual diagnosis, some program participants are dealing with additional challenges. Macedonia said about one-fifth of the individuals involved in the program are experiencing homelessness, not including those who are couch surfing.

"The whole thing is to instill hope into clients, clients who have not had hope for years," Macedonia said.

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