

GUEST SUBMISSION

## Greater Nashua Mental Health celebrates 100 years

Somewhere between 75% to 96% percent of all businesses fail within 15 years. So how is it that a nonprofit agency in Nashua is celebrating its 100th-year anniversary when, according to Forbes magazine, less than half of all nonprofits fail to exist within even a few years? Forbes said it best, "If you do not innovate, you will disappear."

Innovation is a quality that frequently comes to mind when describing the 100-year history of Greater Nashua Mental Health. "GNMH has consistently demonstrated its willingness and ability to stay on the cutting edge of services in an effort to respond to the ever-changing needs of the communities it serves," says Craig Amoth, president and CEO of GNMH. "When you couple innovation with caring, competence and a demonstrated ability to get the job done, then you have a winning formula for longevity." One hundred years is a long time and the agency has certainly undergone a few changes since its early beginnings.

The year was 1920 and the country was still recovering from World War I. That year in Nashua, a group of concerned citizens were focusing on the unmet needs of the region's residents and created the "Community Welfare Council" to address some of those concerns. The organization had humble beginnings and goals that reflected the norms and concerns of the times: dance hall chaperoning and proper language and sanitation on the streetcars were

Greater Nashua

**GNMH**

Mental Health

some of the first matters addressed by the newly formed organization.

A few years later, the Community Welfare Council developed "Fresh Air Camps" for kids who lived in the larger cities and needed a chance to experience nature with their peers. By 1924, the Community Welfare Council officially incorporated to become the "Community Council of Nashua, NH, Inc." and it was the Community Council that early on recognized the need and developed a "Mental Health Hygiene Clinic" at a time when most people were afraid to even mention the words mental illness. Fighting the stigma of mental illness and developing cutting edge programming would eventually become the legacy of the organization's early years, but it was not the only focus for the young agency at that time.

Nashua's Community Council responded to a number of other urgent community concerns during the early years including programs to decrease the infant mortality rate, which was high in those years. Knowing that Nashua was a mill town, the Community Council opened a clinic for the blind in 1930 and provided glass eyes for residents who suffered

the loss of an eye due to a work-related accidents in the mills. Then, when polio began to grip the nation and Nashua, a polio clinic was created in 1940 to treat those afflicted with the illness, which often crippled young children.

Fast forward to when President John F. Kennedy called for the deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill and championed the Community Mental Health Act of 1963. This movement was also an important precursor to later federal legislation for mental healthcare parity, which now requires insurance companies to provide coverage for mental health services in proportion to the coverage it provides for physical healthcare. At the time, the NH State Hospital had 2,800 beds for inpatient psychiatric care. The Community Council responded to the vision of John F. Kennedy to provide quality, affordable mental healthcare in the community and began the process of expanding its services to meet the growing need.

That focus on providing affordable and effective mental health and substance misuse services has continued to drive the current organization, Greater Nashua Mental Health, to fulfill

its mission of: empowering people to lead full and productive lives through effective treatment and support.

GNMH continues to provide innovative programs in response to community needs, just as it did in the earliest days of the agency. For example, research shows that individuals with severe mental health disorders tend to die on average 25 years earlier than the general public. That difference in life expectancy is due to a number of factors, including the tendency for persons with serious mental illness to neglect or avoid seeking primary (physical) health care, sometimes due to prior negative experiences with a healthcare system that is not accustomed to delivering services to this population. In true form, GNMH developed its InteGreat Health program in response. Clients can now receive treatment for mental health, substance use disorders, and primary health care services in one location where they have already built trust and familiarity with a team of providers who understand and care for them.

"Looking back, Greater Nashua Mental Health (GNMH) was always on the cutting edge of providing the kinds of services that the community needed at the time," states Craig Amoth. "Today, integrated healthcare is considered to be the most effective and innovative way of providing whole-person health."

Knowing how difficult it can sometimes be to make the decision to reach out for help, es-

pecially around mental health and substance misuse concerns, we heard from our community that wait times at GNMH could be a problem and could create a barrier to people seeking services. As a result, we implemented a truly innovative program called Open Access, which provides on demand walk-in services four mornings a week. New clients can now walk in and receive a clinical evaluation and recommendations for services the same day. And, most importantly, GNMH never turns anyone away due to inability to pay.

"We've kept our finger on the pulse of the community from its beginnings. We continue to ask our community what its needs are and we listen to the answers. We are here for individuals of all ages, from young children to older adults. As was the case 100 years ago, we continue to address the needs of our community, ensuring that none of our vulnerable residents slips through the cracks of what can often be a complicated and fragmented system of care. We are their safety net," stated Amoth.

Greater Nashua Mental Health has been a resource for Nashua and surrounding towns for 100 years, quietly working behind the scenes, continuously delivering what the community needs for the wellbeing of its residents. The agency offers a wide array of results-based mental health and substance use disorder services, as well as primary healthcare for the residents of southern Hillsborough

County, which in addition to the city of Nashua includes 9 other towns, serving approximately 5,000 clients each year. Operations have grown so fast that GNMH has outgrown its current four Nashua facilities. However, it is evident that the need for its services will not decrease.

"We plan to stick around and continue doing what we do best, but we can't do it alone. It really does "take a village" as the saying goes to provide this level of innovation and care. And in the end, these services help all of us because they make our communities a healthier place to live, work and play. If you would like to be a part of the future of GNMH, we welcome you to join us. There are many ways to contribute including as a Staff Member, an Intern, a Board Member or a Donor. You would be helping to ensure that Greater Nashua Mental Health will be here for the next 100 years!" says Craig Amoth.

For more information about the agency, visit [www.gnmh.org](http://www.gnmh.org), or call (603) 889-6147.

**Face Masks**  
[raggedmountain.com](http://raggedmountain.com)  
**Made In NH!**



**603 356 3042**

**YOU ARE NEVER ALONE.**



Call us at (603) 889-6147.  
24/7 Emergency: 1-800-762-8191  
[www.gnmh.org](http://www.gnmh.org)

**We remain open and are safely providing services.**

**We have been serving our community for the past 100 years and we are looking forward to the next 100!**

Responding to COVID-19 has put a strain on our resources. If you are able to assist us with a donation, we would greatly appreciate your help.

**Please visit [www.gnmh.org/donate](http://www.gnmh.org/donate).  
Thank you!**