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GUEST SUBMISSION

There's no place like home in preventing homelessness

By JILL O'NEILL, HAYLEE
SILVA, SAMANTHA BARTOL,
MAUREEN MAGRO

Guest Columnists

Greater Nashua Mental Health (GNMH) focuses on a "whole person" approach to care. For every individual served, a comprehensive assessment of basic needs is conducted upon entry into services and every 90 days thereafter. Basic needs that remain unmet create barriers to a person's ability to both achieve and maintain mental wellness. A basic need that is often unmet is stable housing. Many individuals and families are impacted due to job loss, disability, low income or violence in the home and are seeking safe, affordable and permanent housing options. Treatment team providers can identify housing needs and link clients to resources, but they do not specialize in preventing homelessness or have extensive knowledge of landlord/tenant laws. Greater Nashua Mental Health understood this and supported the creation of a housing team to better equip staff and support clients. The housing specialists work to develop a hous-

Greater Nashua

GNMH

Mental Health

ing plan with individuals and families identified as homeless, at-risk of homelessness, looking to flee violence in the home or clients who are ready to move to a different level of supported housing. This is done in concert with treatment team members, clients, natural supports, outreach workers and landlords. The housing program works diligently to maintain strong partnerships with local landlords and property managers, as the team views landlords as "customers" as well.

Clients referred to GNMH's housing program receive a formal housing assessment and the staff work with clients and team members to pursue applications for housing programs that offer subsidies or rental assistance. Many times, due to homelessness, clients face

challenges maintaining scheduled appointments due to a need to focus on basic survival and things, even days, can get lost. So, for some clients, securing housing can take longer and requires the housing team to be flexible and creative in finding ways to meet the needs of each individual client or family.

Now more than ever, Greater Nashua Mental Health's housing team is relied upon to support clients' transition out of the hospital, to work with the homeless to secure housing, to find emergency shelter for clients who have been exposed to COVID-19, and to provide support to access resources if clients are behind on rent due to the pandemic. Greater Nashua Mental Health's housing specialists are checking

in frequently with each individual or family in the program to support timely rent payments. For clients who receive a housing subsidy through Greater Nashua Mental Health and who have lost employment, the housing specialists are recalculating rental subsidies while assisting clients to access unemployment benefits. The housing team is working vigorously to stay connected to landlords or property managers who are still renting their vacant units, in order to house individuals and families as quickly as possible. Once housed, the team's goal is to support the individual and family through education, supportive services, and connection to resources so that they can maintain stable housing. There are many who successfully maintain their housing by receiving temporary rental assistance, while others benefit from longer term housing supports. When an individual maintains the basic need of stable housing, there is an increased ability to focus on other things, so other treatment can be more effective. It is rewarding to witness how grateful

individuals and families are to the staff for their support, or a client's gratitude towards the landlord for being given a chance to rent suitable housing, something that they may not otherwise have had the opportunity to do.

Right now, there are many individuals who have lost employment, have taken a cut in pay, are awaiting a check from unemployment, and/or are still working but are worried about their job security. With the uncertainty that many are experiencing during this time, there is a deeper appreciation for the challenges faced by those with unstable housing, as it has become a possibility for others who have never been there before.

I personally experienced temporary homelessness during my freshman year of college when my family home burned down due to an electrical fire. Fortunately, many stepped forward to help my family, but I can't imagine how I would have fared if I didn't have that support. I am extremely proud to

be at the helm of this agency initiative so that we can provide support to others in their time of need. I am proud of the expertise and dedication of the housing team. Ending homelessness is a worthwhile effort that will benefit not only individuals and families, but also the entire community. With effective treatment and support for our clients and from our community, we can move even closer to preventing homelessness from occurring in the first place.

Should you need assistance, we are still open and are accepting new patients. Please call us at 603-889-6147. We also have 24/7 emergency services available by calling 800-762-8191. For more information about any of our programs, you can also visit www.gnmh.org.

Jill O'Neill is associate director of community support services; Haylee Silva is senior Bridge Housing specialist; Samantha Bartol is a housing support specialist and Maureen Magro is the senior housing support specialist for Greater Nashua Mental Health.



YOU ARE NEVER ALONE.

Phone: (603) 889-6147
24/7 Emergency: 1-800-762-8191
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.

Thank you!