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IT'S OUR  COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY FORUM

THE FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, OR OF THE PRESS; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Providing mental health court services during COVID-19

Supporting individuals who struggle with mental illness and are involved in the criminal justice system can be challenging in the best of times. Coordinating supports, managing crises, and ensuring that individuals are obtaining appropriate, fair access to treatment are just some of the challenges that are faced daily within the Mental Health Court program at Greater Nashua Mental Health. These supports require a close interpersonal connection that includes trust, follow through, and accountability. Due to the COVID-19 health crisis, we have rapidly changed the way we approach interpersonal connections while maintaining proper social distancing. We must now rely heavily on the use of technology to facilitate communications. This is a dramatically new approach in forensic treatment.

One of the most critical aspects of mental health treatment is our ability to connect with one another. Imagine going to the doctor and sharing your most personal, traumatic ailments with a provider with whom you felt a lack of trust or connection. You're more likely to suffer alone through your illness, potentially causing a benign ailment to become a serious, debilitating condition. Creating connections when we are suffering can be difficult to do face to face; during this time, our

Greater Nashua

GNMH

Mental Health

clients must make those connections through a phone conversation or telehealth video.

During social distancing and the current health pandemic, the Mental Health Court has been forced to adapt to supporting individuals through new forms of communication. Program professionals have needed to form deep trusting relationships with some of the most vulnerable individuals in our communities, while simultaneously lacking one of the most essential tools to create health: human connection. Many of the individuals who are involved with Mental Health Court do not have stability in their lives. Attending appointments at their local treatment center or participating in court reviews offers clients more than support. Many clients find that these appointments provide them with a connection and a safe space to work through some of life's more difficult challenges, including being involved in the criminal justice system.

How do we move forward? Missing such a critical element of treatment makes it difficult to

know what to expect in the future. Mental Health Court staff needed to become very creative in order to effectively support the needs of both the individual and the community. Sessions are now being done via telephone and Microsoft Teams, a secure live video chat for clinicians and clients in both individual and group settings. Much like its participants, Mental Health Court staff must rely heavily on its community partners to address struggles their clients are facing, such as the need for housing, substance use treatment, and therapeutic services.

Even more importantly, Mental Health Court staff continue to employ flexibility and empathy during each and every situation. We are all affected by the COVID-19 pandemic regardless of our education, economic, or social status. Understanding that we are all in this situation together and supporting one another may be one of the most important characteristics Mental Health Court staff can convey to the participants. We need to understand that going to a local food pantry or grocery store during

this time can be an overwhelming, anxiety-provoking process, rather than the leisurely enjoyable experience it was before. Regardless of how long this crisis lasts, and whether physical distancing ends quickly or lasts a bit longer, it is important that we do not overlook the smallest tasks we may take for granted. Visiting loved ones, neighbors, or simply going to the store to buy toilet paper is not the same as it once was.

Having compassion, empathy, and most im-

portantly patience for those around us are the tools which Mental Health Court staff choose to employ during this trying time. Although difficult, the COVID-19 challenges have afforded us an opportunity to connect with people on a different level and to learn about new ways with which we can most effectively support one another. Even though we are becoming more creative with the use of technology to get us through this unprecedented situation, many of us still believe that

going back to fundamental ways of connecting is what the Mental Health Court clients need most, and are looking forward to when we can connect face to face with our clients once again.

Should you need assistance, we are still open and are accepting new clients. Please call us at 603-889-6147. We also have 24/7 Emergency Services available by calling 1-800-762-8191. For more information about any of our programs, you can also visit www.gnmh.org.



**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!