

Nashua's Mobile Crisis Response Team to expand under new management

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By **Kimberly Houghton**

At a time when substance abuse and mental health problems are escalating because of the pandemic, Nashua's Mobile Crisis Response Team is preparing to expand.

"The goal is to go into the community, meet with these folks, deescalate the situation and connect that person to the most appropriate level of care," said Jessica Gagnon, director of the Mobile Crisis Response Team, which is now under the direction of Greater Nashua Mental Health.

The team, founded in 2015, was previously run by Harbor Care, the agency formerly known as Harbor Homes. State officials were searching for an entity to take over the team, and Greater Nashua Mental Health stepped up to the challenge, according to Donna Albertelli Collins, coordinator of communications and development at GNMH.

Although GNMH has always provided around-the-clock emergency services, Collins said the Mobile Crisis Response Team will be able to visit people in crisis, when necessary, and at all hours of the day.

"We have a one-hour response time. We are definitely committed to that," echoed Gagnon. "We want to capture folks in the moment."

Individuals experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis should not have to struggle and wait for care if they are ready for help, said Gagnon.

Gagnon stressed the GNMH already has the support, along with a vast array of evidence-based practices, to help residents who are in need.

Instead of having them wait in the emergency room for care, individuals can get immediate help, according to Gagnon.

If a face-to-face meeting is needed, the team will arrive at the caller's location within an hour to conduct a comprehensive assessment and decide on an intervention plan to ensure the safety of the person in crisis.

"We are about a week into this, so we are still in our infancy," Gagnon said of the program, adding the team already responded to one of its first clients on Tuesday.

Calls for substance use problems and mental health issues have been on the rise since March, according to Gregory Lennox, assistant director of the program.

"While the economy is looking good as far as the Dow Jones, I still think that we have a lot of work to do," said Lennox.

Gagnon is hoping to have two response teams in place to deploy when necessary. A master level clinician and peer support technician are a part of the team, which includes about a dozen staff members.

"We do plan to expand to about double that staffing in the long-term," she added.

Dr. Cynthia Whitaker, president and CEO at GNMH, said in a statement that there is a vital need for this mobile service in the Greater Nashua area and surrounding towns.

"The Mobile Crisis Response Team will continue to provide support to those experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis, ensuring that the caller receives timely and effective care, while also reserving other community resources for the situations that truly require that higher level of care," Whitaker said in a statement.

The organization is working to create space at 5 Pine St. Ext. that will have the capacity for four crisis beds where individuals can stay for seven days while intensive case management is conducted and a path to treatment is secured.

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