



NKHS

Northeast Kingdom Human Services

We're
All About
**Being
Human!**



Annual REPORT

2024





A Year of Realization

As I reflected on the past year at NKHS and searched for a word to describe and give meaning to the events, I returned to previous annual reports and the messages I had written. As I did so, I found a series of

words, a progression of sorts, describing the journey of NKHS over the past four years: FY 2021- the year of challenge; FY 2022- the year of transition; FY 2023- the year of transformation and growth; FY 2024- year ofREALIZATION.

This was the year of open houses and program launches as the dreams and vision of the past became reality: moving our 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Staff into a new and expanded space in Lyndonville, launching the Mobile Crisis Program for the 3 Northeast Kingdom counties, moving the St. Johnsbury CYFS team to a new family and child center at McGoff Hill, establishing the Front Porch, an outpatient, voluntary mental health urgent care facility in Newport. It was a busy and exciting year made possible by the vision, dedication and hard work of leadership and staff over months and years and brought to fulfillment by their ongoing efforts and persistent belief that our mission “to empower individuals, families, and communities by promoting hope, healing, and support” requires us to find new ways to reach out to those in need. We have been aided and encouraged on our journey by community members and partners who share our vision and recognize our commitment to serving our communities in innovative and flexible ways.

Realization also means that we recognize the successes of this year as points along a longer journey to expand our services at NKHS to meet the unmet mental

health needs of our communities. It means being energized by what we have accomplished to continue the day-to-day work of meeting people where they are and helping them on their own journeys to hope and healing.

As you read this report and learn about the work we do at NKHS, we encourage you to see this as a snapshot of an organization and the people who have dedicated their lives to supporting their fellow community members. This work is not easy, and it's not for everyone. But we believe that we can all play a part in supporting these efforts and creating a better community for all.

As Board Chair, I invite you to become more aware of the services NKHS offers by visiting our website, making sure your friends and acquaintances are as familiar with 988 as they are with 911, finding out about and volunteering for our program standing committees, sponsoring or attending one of our Zero Suicide Initiative trainings, or remembering NKHS on Giving Tuesday.

In October, I'm leaving the NKHS Board after serving an extended term as Chair. I am grateful for the opportunity to have served and appreciate the Board members who have served with me through some interesting times learning what “we're all about being human” means and the community and community partner support. I am also grateful for the staff who shared the journey and who make NKHS the caring organization it is and will continue to be. You are the heart and soul of NKHS, and I thank you for your dedication. And I would be remiss without thanks to the leadership team whose skill and vision have brought NKHS to where it is, especially Kelsey, who said “yes” when it really counted.

With much gratitude and appreciation,

Denise Niemira, Board Chair

A Message from the Executive Director



Before the end of the fiscal year, we began a journey to redo our agency's values. As I write this, we're still developing them, but one value that rose to the top during discussions was courage. That word deeply resonated with me, yet I believe it is often an overlooked quality that our employees and those seeking support embody. It is often taken for granted or assumed that you do the work if you work here. However, that minimizes what we do at NKHS and obscures the incredible impact of courage. Sitting with someone during one of their most

challenging moments takes courage. It takes courage to ask someone who says they are suicidal if they have a plan. It takes courage to see the best in people who have made mistakes. It takes courage to ask for help. It takes courage to push back on harmful stereotypes and advocate for equal rights for people with a mental health diagnosis, a substance use challenge, or someone with a developmental disability.

I see a sense of humility within NKHS. A hardworking NEK mindset that has us committed to doing good work for our community because it is the right thing to do and because we said we would do it. However, that humbleness can obscure work that we should celebrate, not only because it is the right thing to do but also because it contributes to our community's well-being, success, and positive evolution. Supporting those needing help takes courage because it requires faith that people can change and improve. After all, working with people means that a positive outcome is not always assured, and because, even with the best of intentions and hard work, things don't always turn out the way you hope. But this has never dissuaded people here at NKHS because they have the courage to show up daily to serve our community, their neighbors, and those who have yet to need our support.

Every year, I look back with a sense of pride because of the people I get to work with and call my colleagues. I come to work every day and am bolstered by the folks who work at NKHS. I want to remind everyone, including myself, that what happens here, every day, takes immense courage, and everyone is better for it. If you are reading this message, please take a moment to reflect, celebrate, and understand that the people at NKHS, including yourself, are making our community better. Those seeking support are bettering themselves, and both are demonstrating courage worthy of notice and appreciation. I look back with gratitude and know we have the courage to handle what the future brings.

Kelsey Stavseth, Executive Director

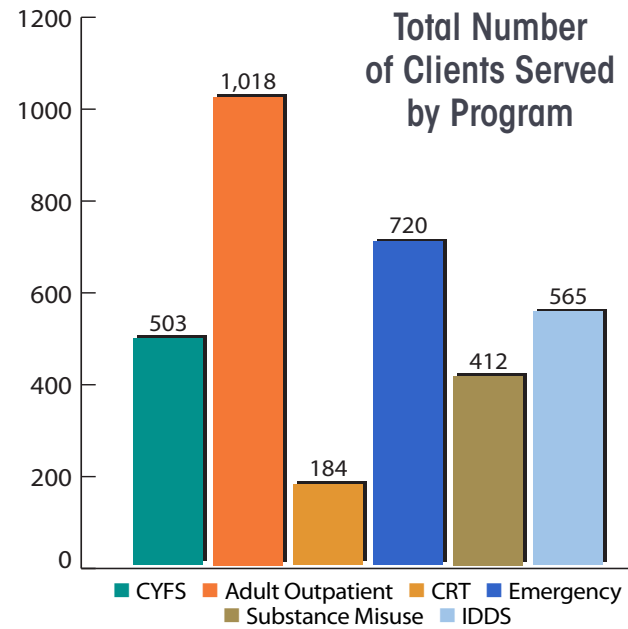
*“...what happens here,
every day, takes immense
courage, and everyone
is better for it.”*



Who We SERVE

NKHS provided **293,496** direct services to **2,878** clients from July 1, 2023–June 30, 2024.

	SERVICES	HOURS
Child, Youth & Family Services	36,336	43,403
Adult Outpatient	10,496	13,794
CRT Treatment	30,046	21,077
Emergency Services	6,529	3,162
IDDS	207,427	810,522
Substance Misuse	2,662	2,739



NORTHEAST KINGDOM HUMAN SERVICES is a private nonprofit agency that provides case management, community and home supports, residential care, psychiatry, medication management, individual therapy, group therapy, vocational supports, school-based counseling, emergency care, and respite services for close to 3,000 clients annually who may be challenged by conditions affecting the mind, body, and spirit. In addition, we offer outreach, training, and consultation services to communities, schools, and businesses in our service area.

NKHS Client Feedback

"First time I have felt supported."

"It has been very helpful knowing I have support for things my child needs and with navigating the school system for my child's advocacy."

"My therapist is amazing and always there when I need her. I couldn't ask for better support!"

"We were able to get all the help for my daughter's transition into a new school, and her social skills are really improving." (CYFS Clients)

"This place and its people have helped changed my life in ways I couldn't begin to describe."

"Keep up the amazing work, I wouldn't be here without your help."

"Friendly, respectful and the therapist listens to what I have to say. The best place I've been to." (Adult Outpatient/SUD Clients)

"Life changing experiences with the team in place." (Developmental Services Client)

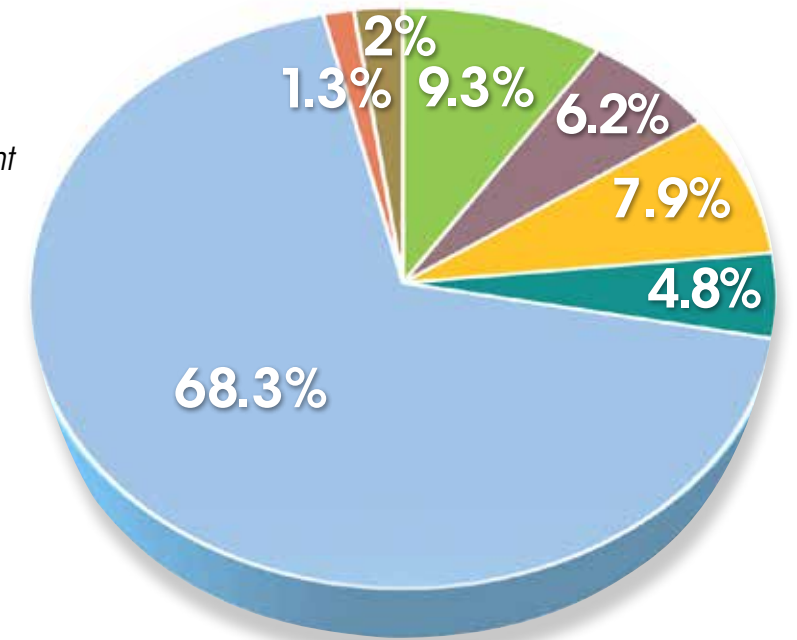
Financial Data 2024

We appreciate our staff's commitment to the work at NKHS. Their efforts enabled another solid financial year supporting our infrastructure, organization, and community needs.

Expenses by Program*

- Developmental services
- Substance abuse, prevention & treatment
- Administration
- Children services
- Adult outpatient services
- Community rehabilitation & treatment
- Emergency services

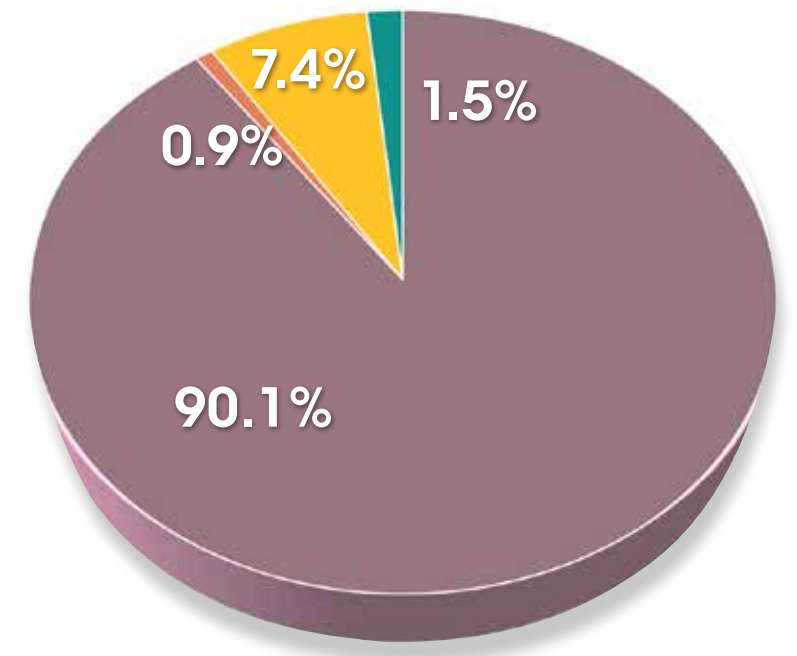
TOTAL EXPENSES \$56,220,362



Revenue by Source*

- Medicaid
- Other patient fees
- Grants & contracts
- Local & other

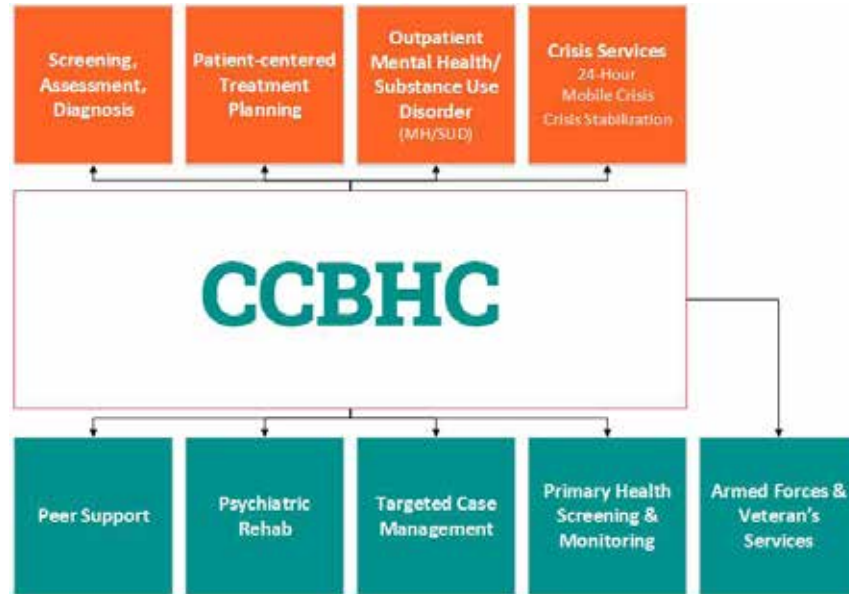
TOTAL REVENUES \$58,536,289



Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic

In 2022, NKHS was one of four designated agencies in the State to receive the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) Planning, Development, and Implementation (PDI) grant. The funds, distributed annually for four years, will prepare NKHS to become a Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC).

A CCBHC is a specially designated clinic that provides a comprehensive range of mental health and substance use services, with a focus on well-coordinated, person-centered, wrap-around care. CCBHCs serve anyone who walks through the door, regardless of their diagnosis and insurance status.



CCBHCs have dramatically increased access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment, expanded states'; capacity to address the overdose crisis, and established innovative partnerships with law enforcement, schools, and hospitals to improve care, reduce recidivism, and prevent hospital readmissions.

Now, two years into the CCBHC PDI grant, NKHS has made incredible strides toward implementing all CCBHC requirements and improving existing services to provide accessible, person-centered care. **Some examples include:**

- NKHS opened the Front Porch Mental Health Urgent Care facility, increasing the agency's capacity to deliver emergency services and support to anyone experiencing an urgent mental health or substance use need (regardless of whether they are a current client at NKHS).
- Renewed focus on Veteran care with the hiring of a Veteran Care Case Manager, who will focus on ensuring Veterans receive specialized support and wraparound care, including therapy, care coordination, peer support, and medication management services.
- An increased focus on care coordination, including screening for Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) and connecting clients with community resources, aims to enhance their overall health and well-being. The recently developed Community Resource Guide on the NKHS website exemplifies this.
- The development of a Language Line offers language interpretation services to ensure clients can access important services no matter what language they speak.
- Increased staffing and extended service hours helped reduce wait times for clients to schedule an appointment.

Developmental Services

The Intellectual Developmental Disabilities Services (IDDS) department officially changed its name to Developmental Services (DS). This change aligns our terminology with that used by other Designated Agencies (DAs), Specialized Service Agencies (SSAs), and the State.

The DS program supports individuals to lead whole and self-directed lives. Individuals are assisted with daily living activities and personal and health care tasks while their independence, choice, and right to make decisions are supported. Individuals are safely integrated into their community and encouraged to participate in meaningful activities and relationships of their choice. DS serves children and adults from birth through end of life for those diagnosed with developmental disabilities or autism.

SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Residential Care Homes/Therapeutic Community Residences
- Shared Living Home Providers
- Community and Employment Support
 - Crisis Intervention
 - Therapeutic Services
 - Respite Care

Inclusive Work for All

At NKHS, our Employment Specialists and Case Managers focus on matching individuals with jobs that align with their strengths. They invest time in job fairs, research, and connecting with businesses to find the perfect fit for both the individual and the company.



Rylee Maseck, passionate about bulldozers, tractors, and cows, found the perfect job at God's Country Farm in Derby Line. Thanks to a community connection and NKHS Employment Specialist Chris Vertrosky, Rylee joined Adrian Fortin's dairy farm in January 2024. Initially skeptical, Adrian welcomed Rylee, with Direct Support Professional Julia Flanders easing the transition. In just two months, Rylee's dedication and enthusiasm have made him a valuable team member. Adrian praises his quick learning, while Julia highlights his growth and resilience.



Wendy excels in housekeeping at Burke Mountain Hotel, where her meticulous work brings her joy and allows her to treat herself to her favorite coffee.

Dylan thrives at Dollar Tree in Littleton, efficiently restocking shelves and ensuring displays are perfect. He also aims to grow his YouTube channel reviewing Disney movies and pursue further education.



Their stories underscore the importance of the right job fit and exemplifies the power of community and inclusive work environments. We're proud to support Rylee, Wendy, Dylan, and so many other individuals on their journey to success!

Art is for everyone; Celebrating Diverse Minds

Creating art allows for individual expression, a chance to share and connect with others, and a creative outlet for sharing feelings, especially when vocalizing those feelings can be challenging.

Ellen Davis (aka Ellie) is a Down syndrome client in her 60s who loves art, often coloring with colored pencils. Her service coordinator, Kate Hall, introduced her to GRACE workshops through the Rural Arts Collaborative. Ellie gradually embraced creating new art and stepping out of her comfort zone.

Ellie and Kate made weekly trips to Craftsbury Common for GRACE classes, where Ellie formed close friendships. Her fellow artists affectionately call her a “professional hugger”; reflecting the program’s strong community spirit.

Beyond GRACE, Ellie enjoys knitting scarves, which she donates to nursing homes, food shelves, and her congregation. In June, the GRACE program held an art show featuring Ellie’s art.

In March, NKHS held an online art show featuring the talents of many DS individuals. To see more of this impressive collection, visit the DS Art Gallery on the NKHS website.

Shared Living is Living Better



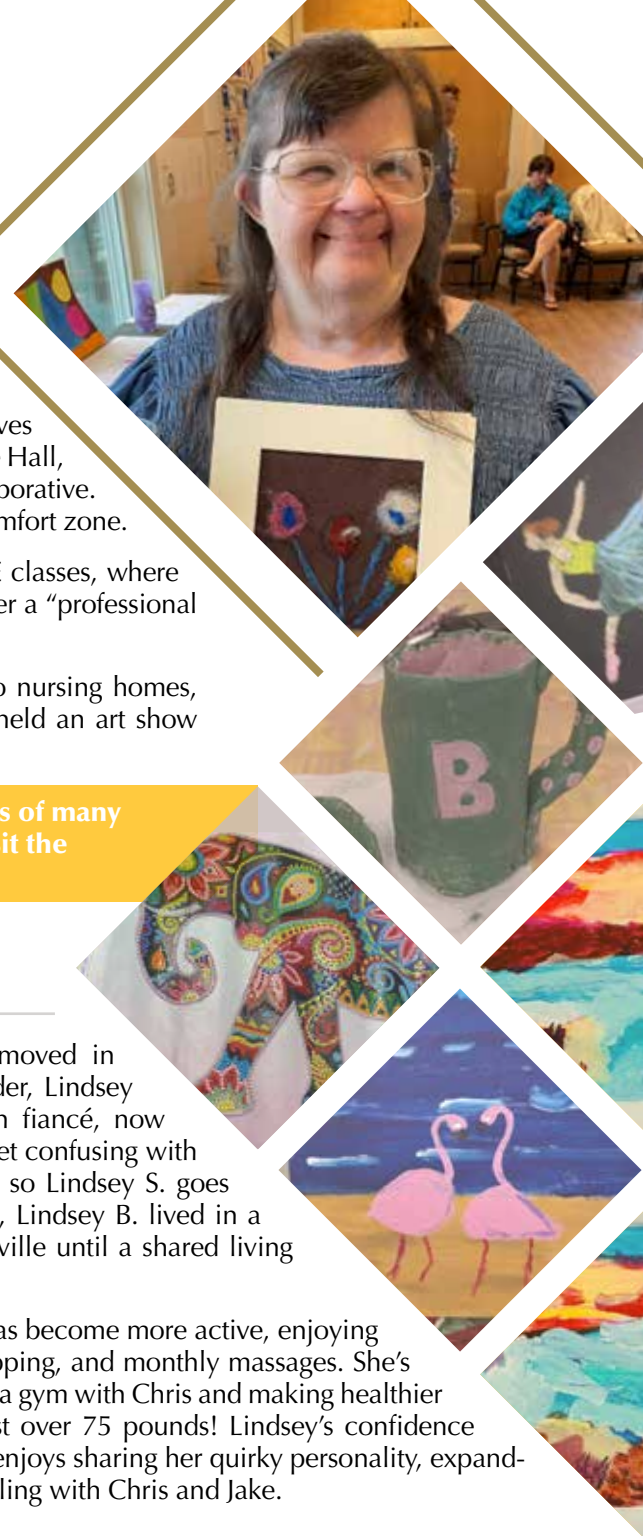
Four years ago, Lindsey B. moved in with her Shared Living Provider, Lindsey Scezla-Garfield, and her then fiancé, now husband, Jake. Things could get confusing with two Lindseys under one roof, so Lindsey S. goes by Chris at home. Before this, Lindsey B. lived in a 24-hour staffed home in Danville until a shared living situation opened up.

Since moving in, Lindsey B. has become more active, enjoying time with family, friends, shopping, and monthly massages. She’s focused on her health, joining a gym with Chris and making healthier choices—together, they’ve lost over 75 pounds! Lindsey’s confidence has blossomed, and she now enjoys sharing her quirky personality, expanding her social circle, and traveling with Chris and Jake.

From cruises to Myrtle Beach, she’s fully embraced adventure. Her next big dream? Traveling to Japan—she’s even started learning Japanese!

“Jake and Chris (Lindsey) have an open and warm home where they freely give their time and energy to others. Jake and Lindsey have been a great asset to NKHS, positively impacting the lives they touch. I’ve been very fortunate and privileged to have them as one of the families I work with at NKHS.”

- Emily Brown, DS Service Coordinator



Developmental Services – Residential

Residential Care Homes/Therapeutic Community Residences are state-licensed group living arrangements designed to meet the needs of people who cannot live independently and often require a higher level of care and support than can typically be provided through other home support options.

Even though they’re group settings, the care is always personalized to meet each person’s unique needs.

Residents might get help with medical issues, emotional or behavioral supports, and assistance with daily activities like eating, walking, personal hygiene, and dressing. Plus, these homes offer nursing oversight and can sometimes provide the same level of care you’d find in a nursing home, ensuring everyone gets the attention they need.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS THROUGH ACTS OF GIVING

The Residential Services staff have been finding meaningful ways to support and connect with their local neighborhoods. DS Residential teams have shown an incredible commitment to giving back through baking, volunteering, hosting events, and donating.

At Parkway House, staff and a resident volunteer each week at the St. Johnsbury Community Lunch, regularly donating food and delivering meals to the Salvation Army. Cedar Lane DSP Wanda Hazen has also been making a difference, preparing food and donating it to the Community Refrigerator in St. Johnsbury, providing essential support to those in need. With the help of NKHS Residential Homes and a local business, Lisa Allard, RN, organized a collection of goods and funds for flood victims in Hardwick held during Lyndonville’s Stars and Stripes annual event.

These acts of kindness highlight the deep connection between the Residential Services staff and their communities, proving that even small actions can make a big impact.

Team NKHS Shines at the Walk to End Alzheimer’s

On September 24, 2023, the Residential Services program proudly participated in the Walk to End Alzheimer’s in St. Johnsbury, joining forces to raise awareness and funds for this important cause. Team NKHS, with 19 members, raised an impressive \$7,403 in support of Alzheimer’s research and care. The event’s success was made possible by the hard work and passion of many individuals, including Lisa Allard, Laurie Young, Lori Smith, and numerous others who contributed to the team’s efforts.

Nancy Poulis, Chairperson of the NEK Walk to End Alzheimer’s, also visited Cedar Lane, touring the home and meeting with residents and staff. She expressed deep appreciation for the staff and shared her hopes to see more homes like Cedar Lane dedicated to meeting the needs of those with Alzheimer’s and dementia.

The success of Team NKHS highlights the power of community in coming together for a worthy cause, demonstrating that every step makes a difference in the fight against Alzheimer’s.



Emergency SERVICES

NKHS offers an array of services to aid people experiencing crises. Each service works along a continuum of care, which allows the person in crisis to determine, when appropriate, how much intervention and support they need. The continuum also allows the person in crisis to move freely between different levels of service they require, both during and pre/post-crisis.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. NKHS and NCSS contract with DMH and Vibrant to provide 24/7 state-wide coverage of Lifeline call/chat/text center supports for those in a mental health crisis.



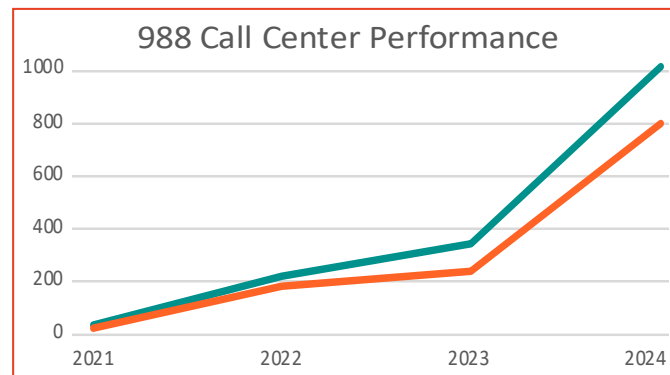
Over the past four years, the 988 call center has made significant advancements in handling calls quickly and making its services easier to access.

June 2021: 37 calls, answered 25, with an average answer speed of 22 seconds.

June 2022: 222 calls, answered 187, with an average answer speed of 18 seconds.

June 2023: 341 calls, answered 241, with an average answer speed of 11 seconds.

June 2024: 1,015 calls, answered 800, with an average answer speed of 8 seconds.



Front Porch Urgent Mental Healthcare

On Friday, June 14, NKHS held an open house at its new mental health urgent care center, the Front Porch, in Newport, VT. Years of advocacy efforts, community support, and careful planning have come together to provide impactful and immediate support for adults and families experiencing mental health crises throughout the Northeast Kingdom. Community partners, government officials, stakeholders, and NEK residents toured the facility, met our dedicated staff, learned about our services, and viewed the building renovation plans.

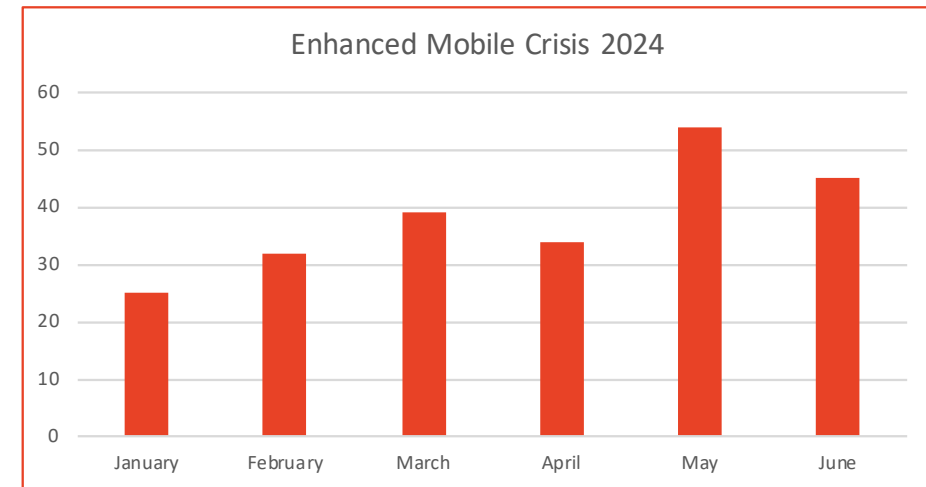
The Front Porch Mental Health Urgent Care is a sanctuary for those navigating the complexities of mental health care in a safe and welcoming environment.

Front Porch Mental Health Urgent Care

235 Lakemont Rd • Newport City, VT
(802) 624-4016
Monday, 7am–Saturday, 11pm (24/7)
Sundays 7am–11pm

Enhanced Mobile Crisis

Vermont's Enhanced Mobile Crisis Service ensures all Vermonter's have access to 24/7 mental health, emotional, or substance misuse (non-medical) crisis care. A 2-person peer and clinician team from local designated mental health agencies quickly responds, offering caring and compassionate support wherever the individual may be. NKHS Mobile Crisis Team began responding to calls on November 1, 2023.



Mental Health Crisis Specialist

Mental Health Crisis Specialists are embedded in the Vermont State Police barracks in St. Johnsbury and Derby. They support VSP and the community on mental health-related calls.

Beyond the time on the scene, MHCS provides services and assistance outside of the calls they respond to.

- MHCS provided **110 hours of client consultation services**, including discussions with law enforcement, family members, treatment providers, and community members regarding individuals in crisis.
- MHCS dedicated **75 hours of client-related services**, involving follow-ups, outreach, and ongoing support for clients outside of crisis situations.
- MHCS spent **79 hours offering non-client consultation services**, including educating law enforcement, community members, and others about mental health, behavior, diagnoses, and available resources. MHCS attended community meetings to stay informed and provided helpful resources to those not in crisis to reduce stress for individuals and families.

MHCS Baylee Olden received high praise for her integral involvement in a challenging case.

"Had it not been for your efforts, this information may not have come out, and the offender would still be out and about, and who knows what he would have done to his (family member) or another member of the public. In spending time with the offender at the barracks, it is clear to me that he is a danger to society. You should take a moment and reflect, as your intervention and doing the right thing may have very well saved people's lives. I appreciate your dedication to the public's safety. You have proven time and time again that you are an invaluable member of the State Police team we have here at the St. Johnsbury barracks."

- Sgt. Brennan, VT State Police



Adult Outpatient and Substance Use

The Adult Outpatient Program (AOP) offers a comprehensive continuum of care, tailored to meet the unique needs of each individual. Whether facing daily life stressors, acute emotional distress, severe and persistent mental illness, or substance use challenges, AOP provides compassionate and effective support.

Our Substance Use services focus on health promotion, prevention, intervention, treatment, harm reduction, and recovery. We aim to prevent, reduce, and eliminate the health impacts of alcohol, cannabis, opioids, and other substances. Using evidence-based practices and a person-centered approach, NKHS supports individuals on their journey to lasting recovery and a healthier, more fulfilling life.

The following services are offered:

- Case Management
- Veterans Case Management
- Reach Up Case Management
- Collaboration with Outreach Enhanced Emergency Case Management
- Collaboration with DCF Family Service and Lunch Service
- Individual and Group Therapy
- Eldercare
- Psychiatric Medication Management
- Hospital Diversion

Community-Centered Substance Use Recovery

Building meaningful connections requires meeting people where they are and making an effort to understand their unique needs, perspectives, and experiences. Connecting in-person fosters empathy, trust, and more effective communication, which is key to creating strong, lasting relationships.

The Adult Outpatient team takes this to heart as they begin the first phase of their goal to help underserved community members seek treatment for substance use.

Amber Robbins, NKHS Case Manager, and Coral Sargent, NKHS Peer Support Specialist, are actively seeking to connect with community members to understand the support needs of those struggling with substance use and the barriers to treatment. They are reaching out to community partners such as Restorative Justice, Kingdom Recovery, Probation and Parole, Hireability, and NEKCA to learn about their needs and how they can best connect with those seeking support. They are also looking for opportunities to join community con-

versations at tabling events, local libraries, community meetings, and have recently begun an embedding program with the Newport Police Department for substance use-related calls. This proactive approach allows Amber and Coral to share information about the services NKHS offers and gain a better understanding of how NKHS can provide support.

As a case manager, Amber plays a crucial role in helping clients navigate the often complex recovery process. She assists clients with phone calls and paperwork, connects them to resources for housing, transportation, food, therapy, and any service that aids their recovery. She notes the warm welcome and support from the communities and organizations, such as NEKCA, which has offered space at their food shelves for case management and therapy.

Through these efforts, the Adult Outpatient team meets individuals where they are and listens to their needs, fostering trust and creating pathways to more accessible and meaningful support. They hope this approach ensures that those struggling with substance use feel heard, understood, and empowered to take the first steps toward recovery. With community partnerships and a commitment to being present in the spaces that matter, these outreach efforts will lay the foundation for long-term, impactful change.



Community Rehabilitation Treatment

The Community Rehabilitation Treatment (CRT) program provides comprehensive community-based support services and assists adults diagnosed with severe mental illness in voluntary, person-centered treatments. The program helps individuals and their families develop skills and supports essential to living their desired lives.

CRT offers the following services:

- Case Management & Service Coordination
- Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) services and additional peer supports
- Psychiatric Assessment and Medication Management
- Vocational Coordination (IPS)
- Representative Payees
- Housing Support and Coordination

“The support was more than what I could have expected! Thank you to all the staff. Each and every one was informative, patient, sensitive and caring! Thank you!”

“The staff worked with me in developing new skills and habits to increase my success.”

“Every member of my team at the CARE Bed has played a positive and supportive role in my treatment. My experience wouldn’t have been the same, or as complete with any of them not being here to help me. This time has been so productive and educational and I can’t thank them, or the program enough. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

Community Aid and Recovery Effort – CARE Bed

The CARE Bed is a two-bed crisis unit with 24-hour staffing, seven days a week. The CARE Bed provides an alternative to hospitalization or a step-down option for clients in a mental health crisis, with an overall mission to serve clients within its community. During someone’s stay at the CARE Bed, the staff helps individuals regain hope, personal responsibility, self-esteem, and control. The staff supports individuals as they create personal goals, make healthy choices, and engage with their natural supports.



Average length of stay - 6.03 days

Number of individuals who utilized the CARE Bed (some multiple times) - 65



Please help us
WELCOME...



We are excited to welcome Kate Olney as the new Director of Development at NKHS. With over 20 years of nonprofit leadership experience, Kate brings expertise in strategic partnerships, capital campaigns, and fundraising events. Her proven track record will be essential as we face new opportunities and challenges.

Kate's deep connection to our mission and her personal passion for philanthropy make her a key asset in advancing NKHS's work of providing hope and healing to those in need. "This is a dream come true," says Kate. "NKHS's mission is not just a professional commitment, but a cause close to my heart, and I'm thrilled to contribute to a cause that's saving lives in Vermont."

Before joining NKHS, Kate served as Director of Donor Engagement at VTDigger and Director of Development for the Vermont Historical Society and St. James Healthcare Foundation in Montana, where she led major campaigns and secured significant funding for healthcare services.

To learn more about how you can support and strengthen the impactful work at NKHS, connect with Kate Olney at kolney@nkhs.net or 802-535-9987.

Children, Youth, and Family Services (CYFS)

CYFS provides comprehensive services based on an assessment of the individualized and unique needs of children and families. These services are strength-based, family-driven, and trauma-informed.

The Home and Community Support Program offers comprehensive trauma-informed, strengths-based care for youth and families (birth to 21) in home, community, and office settings. From assessments to service planning, crisis intervention, education, and consultation, we cover all aspects of support.

The Early Childhood Program supports children in their natural settings, fostering a sense of connection to the environment. We offer mental health and behavioral consultations for families and professionals, promoting social-emotional development and kindergarten readiness.

The School-Based Services Program offers trauma-informed case management and counseling in schools, helping youth address social, emotional, and mental health needs. Services include assessments, counseling, behavior modification, crisis intervention, and consultation.

CYFS provided financial support to 110 youth and their families, totaling just under \$17,000, so kids could participate in classes, camps, and various activities they might not have otherwise been able to.

- **29 youth** were able to take horseback riding lessons and swimming lessons
- **19 families** were provided financial support to enjoy Jay Peak, Santa's Village, and Vermont State Parks and were given gas cards to support their travel to these family activities.
- **25 youth** received financial support to attend summer camps such as Buck Lake, Coutts, River of Life, and others.
- **30+ youth** engaged in therapeutic outdoor group programming such as kayaking, skiing, and hiking.
- **NKHS supported many other youths in their desires to attend gymnastic classes, have gym memberships, swim at local pools, and receive supplies to enjoy their favorite activities.**

NKHS Children and Family Center Opens

On May 6th, the new NKHS Children and Family Center opened on McGoff Hill in Lyndon, VT. The move allows the CYFS department to expand its services and enhance its mission to provide a welcoming, safe, and nurturing environment for children and families.

The center is a hit with the kids, who love the added themed rooms like the board game room and the music room. The large kitchen allows families and kids to connect through cooking. And with the expanded outdoor space, plans are in motion to create outdoor fun and exploration. Vicky remarked that one of the kids said that NKHS needed to move out so they could live there.

The CYFS South Team shared, "As we inaugurate this new building, we're not just adding square footage; we're multiplying the potential for positive impact. It's a hub where children can learn, families thrive, and communities flourish together."

The Children and Family Center hosted two open house events: one for the residents of McGoff Hill, fulfilling a promise made to the neighbors during the community meetings, and another for community partners. The center has been warmly received, and all are excited about the space and its potential for growth in supporting NEK families.

NKHS Children and Family Center's Hands-On Therapeutic Approach Blossoms with New Community Garden

The NKHS Children and Family Center is coming together, and many moving parts are working to make the dream of an interactive community center/therapeutic setting available to kids and families. Nathaniel Lesch-Huie, Clinical Care Coordinator, believes in the value of learning through hands-on engagement and involving clients in creating and completing projects that yield long-term benefits for clients and the community. Beyond learning how to grow food, understanding that growing things takes preparation, cultivation, and nurturing is why the Children and Family Center garden project is vital to maintaining the community therapeutic values the center is helping instill.

The garden space is ready for planting with six 4'x8' raised beds in a weed-protected mulched area. NKHS clients took part in every step of the process and now get to help maintain and grow beautiful gardens for years to come. Therapeutic engagement through hands-on activities continues to be an essential element of the work done at the center. With lots of resources and plenty of space and property around the building, the garden crew looks forward to the next project: creating nature trails in the woods behind the facility. Lots more to come, so stay tuned!

Zero Suicide INITIATIVE

The NKHS Zero Suicide Initiative Team partners with organizations and individuals to bring suicide prevention education, awareness, understanding, and support to all Northeast Kingdom communities. If you or your organization is interested in one of the following trainings, visit NKHS.org and submit a Contact Us form requesting more information.

GIZMO'S PAWSOME GUIDE TO MENTAL HEALTH

NKHS brings mental health educational programming to kids from pre-k to 5th grade with Gizmo's Pawsome Guide to Mental Health. This program teaches what it means to be mentally healthy. An NKHS employee visits a classroom by invitation from the school and shares the story of Gizmo, a therapy dog, and how he helps kids recognize their feelings and how to manage them.

- Taught in 51 classes from Pre-K to 5th grade

IT'S REAL

It's Real, a program developed by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), addresses middle school, high school, and college-age students. The program raises awareness about mental health issues, how to start a conversation about mental health, the importance of self-care, and how to reach out for help.

- Taught in 23 Middle School classrooms

QPR (QUESTION, PERSUADE, AND REFER) GATEKEEPER TRAINING

For college-age students, teachers, faculty, parents, caregivers, and community members, NKHS offers QPR Gatekeeper Training, an introductory guide to raise awareness, dispel myths and misconceptions, and teach three key skills to help save a life. QPR trainees learn to recognize the warning signs of suicide, how to offer hope, and how to get help.

- NKHS employees and Zero Suicide Team leaders, Ruth Marquette and Terri Lavelly facilitated 15 QPR trainings, teaching 232 individuals.
- QPR reached a milestone in May, Terri and Ruth presented the 100th QPR training
- Of note, training was conducted for Charleston School, Vermont State University Residential Life-Lyndon, and Circus Smirkus camp counselors and coaches.



ASIST - Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center describes ASIST as a two-day, two-trainer workshop designed for family, friends, and any community member, as they may be the first to talk with a person at risk. The emphasis is on teaching suicide first aid to help a person at risk stay safe and seek further help as needed. Participants learn to use a suicide intervention model to identify persons with thoughts of suicide, seek a shared understanding of reasons for dying and living, develop a safe plan based upon a review of risk, be prepared to do follow-up, and become involved in suicide-safer community networks.

- In FY24, NKHS held four, 2-day training sessions for over 2-dozen individuals.
- NKHS staff and behavioral health leadership from Northern Counties Healthcare attended these trainings. This collaborative effort strengthens our internal team and fosters a unified approach to mental health care within the broader community.

- Participant feedback:

"I thought it was very helpful, very informative. I can't wait to continue to share this training not only within NKHS, but across the state of Vermont as it will strengthen the knowledge for everyone in suicide first aid."

Mental Health First Aid Training

MHFA training teaches individuals how to help someone struggling with their mental health or experiencing a mental health crisis. The course teaches how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of addictions and mental illnesses. Mental Health First Aid for Adults teaches people how to recognize signs of mental health or substance use challenges in adults ages 18 and older, offer and provide initial help, and guide a person toward appropriate care if necessary. Topics covered include anxiety, depression, psychosis, and addictions.

Youth Mental Health First Aid teaches parents, family members, caregivers, teachers, school staff, peers, neighbors, health and human services workers, and other caring citizens how to help an adolescent (age 12-18) who is experiencing a mental health or addictions challenge or is in crisis. Youth Mental Health First Aid is primarily for adults who regularly interact with young people.



NKHS has two Adult Mental Health First Aid trainers and two Youth Mental Health First Aid Trainers. In May, NKHS added Teen Mental Health First Aid (TMHFA) to support teens in grades 10-12 or ages 15-18 in identifying, understanding, and responding to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among their friends and peers.

- NKHS facilitated two Adult and two Youth MHFA trainings for community members and NKHS staff

Community ENGAGEMENT

At NKHS, our values are at the heart of everything we do, shaping the way we work and the promises we keep. One of the values we hold closest is community. Being part of our communities means showing up, getting involved, supporting one another, and working together to build healthy, vibrant spaces for everyone. We're genuinely grateful for the connections we've made and the sense of camaraderie that brings us all together.



Some places you'll find us:

- > American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
- > American Red Cross Blood Drives
- > ASSIST Training
- > Caledonia Child Advocacy Center
- > Documentary Film Screenings
- > Hosting a Family Community Event
- > Job Fairs
- > Legislative Breakfast
- > Legislative Testimonies
- > Mental Health First Aid Training
- > National Rural Health Day
- > NEK Rainbow Coalition Pride Parade and Festival
- > NEK! Prosper
- > North Country Hospital
- > Northeast Kingdom Community Action
- > Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital
- > Orleans Child Advocacy Center
- > Out of the Darkness Walk
- > Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) Training
- > St. Johnsbury Sparkles
- > St. Johnsbury Town Band Ice Cream Social
- > The St. Johnsbury Community Hub
- > Town Meetings throughout the Northeast Kingdom
- > Vermont Care Partners
- > Vibrant ONE
- > Walk for Recovery

Staff Recognition

NKHS went all out to celebrate its incredible team at the annual banquet in January 2024! With an exciting "Under the Big Top" theme, we honored the amazing feats of our employees. The spotlight shone brightly on those nominated by their peers and selected by a committee of past winners for their dedication and hard work. A huge round of applause and congratulations to all our winners!

- Patricia L. Rhodes Award** **Cindy Longe**
- Unsung Hero Award** **Coral Sargent**
- Leadership Award** **Jason Chester**
- Call to Action Service Award** **Lynn Ruggles**
- The Rene Rose Award**
- Outstanding Community Support Workers** **Jess Poulin, Hope Reeve, James Wheeler, Nathaniel Lesch-Huie**
- Residential Worker of the Year** **Cindy White & Erica Davis**
- Team Award** **Support Staff Teams, North and South**



5 YEARS of SERVICE

- Jacqueline Patneau
- Courtney Humphrey
- Melissa Cote
- Jennifer Heroux-Bachand
- Blake Lewis
- Gretchen Fadden
- Kheilbi LaRose
- Francis Varkala
- Carol Stevens
- Gracelynn Thwaite
- Amy Lawrence
- Kelly Smith
- Thomas Cantin
- Emily Doner
- Matthew Grenier
- Erin Gaudreau
- Noah Wainwright
- Cynthia Goodwin

10 YEARS of SERVICE

- Joyce Littlefield
- Terry Bunnell
- Brenda Smires
- William Eason
- Tisha Leo
- Krystal Donaghy
- Casey Crooks
- Glenn Pierce

15 YEARS of SERVICE

- Jeremy York
- Erin Demers
- Kyle Griggs

20 YEARS of SERVICE

- Bonnie Cassady
- Timothy Gould
- Sky Shover
- Steven McManus

25 YEARS of SERVICE

- Julie Fortin

30 YEARS of SERVICE

- Alan Stevens
- Deborah Lucas-Mayhew
- Betty Greenwood

35 YEARS of SERVICE

- Cathy Etheze
- Tammy Dupuis

40 YEARS of SERVICE

- Joanne Sanville





NKHS
Northeast Kingdom Human Services

We're
All About
**Being
Human!**

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(800) 696-4979

2225 Portland Street
St. Johnsbury, VT 05819
(800) 649-0118

NKHS.org

MISSION

We're all about being human. Our mission is to empower individuals, families and communities by promoting hope, healing, and support.

VISION

To be leaders in rural health and human services by offering programs that are innovative, flexible, and comprehensive.