

VALLEY NEWS

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MENTAL HEALTH

An Upper Valley crisis prevention success story

By **SHELLY BECKER**

For the Valley News

Although those of us on West Central Behavioral Health's Mobile Crisis Response Team usually see clients in crisis in their homes, schools or communities, there are times when a crisis comes directly to us.

In this case, it was a cool spring morning in March. I was in our Claremont office doing my mobile crisis response paperwork when I heard the front door open. I got up and saw a woman standing there. I asked how I could help. She looked at me and said, "I went to another counseling place and they sent me here."

I inquired further: "Please tell me what's going on." She replied, "I want to kill myself." Her words were direct and piercing, yet flat, without intonation. I immediately asked her to step into my office for an evaluation.

The woman told me, "I've been under a lot of stress, and sometimes I feel depressed and feel like dying." We discussed her thoughts in full. She was calm and cooperative, though at times she cried uncontrollably. I expressed empathy while listening carefully. She had been struggling emotionally for some time and lacked support. We developed a safety plan and discussed coping skills. I handed her a card with the NH Rapid Response Access Point crisis hotline number and encouraged her to call, day or night. (That number is 833-710-6477.)

Often, just knowing help is a phone call away will calm a person in crisis. As we talked a bit longer, she felt she was ready to head back out into the world and manage her day. Sometimes, it takes a caring person who listens. In this case, I was also able to schedule further appointments to help this woman feel like her life was worth living.

I now see this woman weekly for crisis stabilization appointments. She has not expressed suicidal thoughts for a long period of time. She comes to our appointments and engages fully. We have been able to identify strong supports, coping skills, triggers and protective factors, all of which have aided in keeping her out of the hospital.

The resources I gave her enabled her to find a primary care physician. Through this she was able to get the prescriptions she needs. She now knows there are people who care about her mental health and who want to support her in many ways.

As I think back on the day we met, I'm so grateful that mobile crisis was an option and that I was available. Getting sent from one facility to another while being plagued with thoughts of killing herself could have resulted in a very different outcome had we not been there for her. This client has expressed many times how appreciative she is to have West Central Behavioral Health in her corner. And we're grateful she found West Central in her moment of need.

Shelly Becker is a mobile crisis clinician at West Central Behavioral Health, the New Hampshire community mental health center for the Upper Valley and Sullivan County, with clinic locations in Claremont, Lebanon and Newport.

