A Helping Hand through HHS

A single mom who was recently laid off struggled to get by for several months, desperately trying to pay her bills on time so she could remain in her Newton apartment where her two children attend local schools. She couldn’t imagine moving, and eventually reached out to the city’s social services caseworker with her dilemma. The case manager helped her apply for food stamps, fuel assistance, a short-term fund to bring one of her utility bills up to date and referred her to the local food pantries and workforce development so she could find a new job.

This woman’s story is like so many who seek help from Newton's Health and Human Services Department. And perhaps many more people are unaware of the services available to Newton residents experiencing difficult times. Newton’s social service staff work to serve Newton residents by providing case management, guidance, outreach, and prevention services.

When someone reaches out, they can expect to receive: listening, problem-solving, support resources and referrals, phone calls or in-person consultations, assistance with applications and connections to longer term services. More than 1,300 people received services last fiscal year, an increase of 25 percent over the previous year.

“We've helped everyone from a single mom with kids looking for access to daycare on a train line to an isolated individual who needed a referral to legal services and some problem-solving help,” said Pam Weissman, the Director of Social Services. “If you live in Newton and are facing difficulty, it’s worth a phone call to see how we can help. No one should worry alone.”

Weissman has been a social worker for more than 25 years. She joined the city in 2016, having previously worked in psychiatric emergency services on the South Shore. She is also an advisor for Boston College School of Social Work in the field education department.

Nancy Storer, the social services case manager, has worked for the city since 2017. She previously worked as an elder abuse advocate and community outreach specialist for a local domestic violence organization. Nancy grew up in Newton and attended Newton Public Schools.

“We see clients here at City Hall or make home visits when appropriate. We also work hard to be out in the community and meet people where they are, for example at a camp fair or the food pantry or a program at the library,” Storer said. “Examples of some of the things I’ve helped clients with are applications to short-term funds to help pay for basic needs, fuel assistance, housing, and more. It really varies, but what we do is based on what the client needs.”

The HHS social service staff work collaboratively with the Department of Senior Services case manager based at the Senior Center, Emily Kuhl. Kuhl has worked for the city since 2015 and has been in the field of aging for 10 years. She focuses on the unique needs of residents age 60 and older.

Some of the specific services that all city social workers can help people with include: budget/financial planning, emergency oil/fuel assistance, financial assistance, food insecurity, housing/shelter, SNAP applications, mental health referrals, legal assistance, substance use referrals, domestic violence advocacy/shelter referrals, connections to veterans services, support groups, WIC referrals and workforce development.

To make an appointment with Nancy or Pam, please call 617-796-1420. To reach Emily, call 617-796-1672. For more information, visit the HHS website at www.newtonma.gov/health