

## New system increasing access, reducing wait time

By **Mike Wade / NRVCS**  
[mwade@nrvcs.org](mailto:mwade@nrvcs.org)

**PULASKI** - For years now, officials with NRVCS have been wrestling with the challenge of meeting an ever-increasing demand for services, as more and more local residents are requesting help with behavioral health issues like mental illness and substance use disorders.

In fact, there was a time when it was not unusual for individuals seeking treatment (who weren't in crisis) to be put on waiting lists that would extend for weeks - or even months - in some instances.

"That was never an ideal situation for anyone," explains NRVCS Executive Director James Pritchett. "It was a constant source of frustration for us, but more importantly, it was a problem for our clients, as well as the partner agencies in the community that were referring folks to our agency."

"Ideally, of course, you want people to get the help they need as quickly as possible but we were having serious difficulty keeping pace with that demand," Pritchett adds. "So, there was no question that something had to change."

It turns out that these issues were not unique to the New River Valley. Many of Virginia's Community Services Boards (CSBs), the state's designated network of public agencies for behavioral health treatment, were experiencing similar difficulties with getting individuals enrolled in services.

To address this growing problem, members of the General Assembly earlier this year approved \$4.9 million in funding to help 18 CSBs (including NRVCS) launch a new program known as Same Day Access (SDA). Essentially, SDA allows a person who calls or appears at a CSB to be assessed that same day - eliminating the need for that individual to be placed on a waiting list - and thereby connecting them to services in a more timely manner.



**Checking schedules:** Erin Brosius, NRVCS Outpatient Services Lead, reviews the day's scheduled appointments with Becky Thatcher, a member of the support team at NRVCS' Pulaski Center. Brosius has played a pivotal role in implementation of the agency's Same Day Access program. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS)

In announcing the funds last May, Dr. Jack Barber, Interim Commissioner for the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, declared that implementation of SDA in all 40 of the state's CSBs would, "be one of the most significant improvements for mental health services in Virginia's recent history."

Locally, the plan to introduce SDA actually began more than a year ago. NRVCS officials began to take a hard look at data in March 2016 to evaluate the number of intakes being completed, the number of staff who would be available to do assessments, and current "no show" rates (appointments

where an individual fails to keep their appointment.)

The agency eventually contracted with a consultant to review the collected data and evaluate the existing process, with the goal of developing a system that would not only reduce waiting time for initial appointments, but also decrease the no show rates for follow-up appointments. SDA was then launched on March 15, 2017.

"It's definitely been a process," notes Erin Brosius, Outpatient Services Lead for NRVCS. "It really is a change from the way

## Same Day

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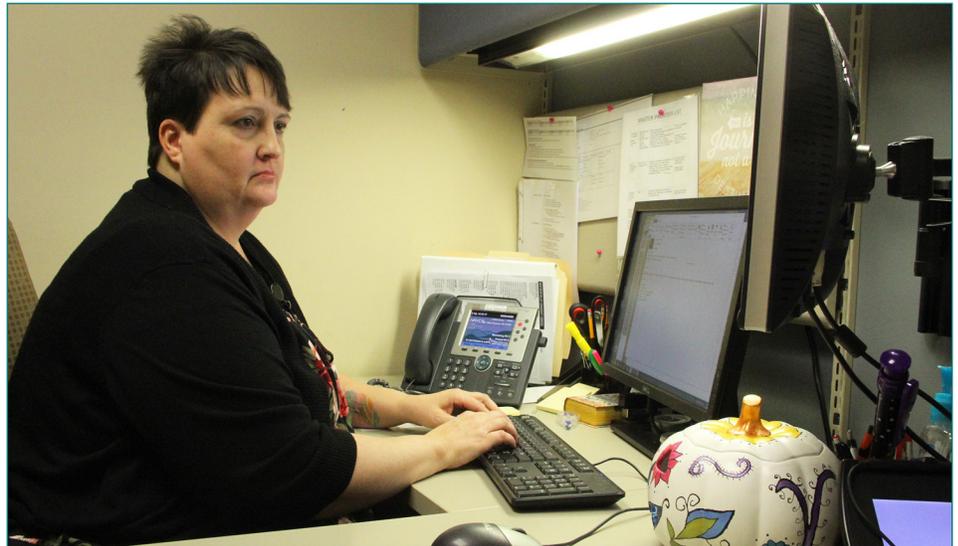
we have always done things here at NRVCS. Early on, it was a challenge to change that mind-set. It's been a change in our agency culture."

Brosius points out that one of the primary issues that had to be addressed in the beginning was identifying who would handle initial assessments for individuals utilizing the SDA process. Licensed-eligible clinicians were pulled from various NRVCS programs to serve in this capacity.

"It wasn't as simple as just reassigning people to these new roles," explains Brosius. "They were not all trained in the same programs, they reported to different supervisors, and while assessments were all quality work, they were done very differently."

"Another challenge was making sure that all of the assessors were educated on all of the programs and resources within the agency and community, including learning the Medical Necessity Criteria for each service," Brosius adds. "I am very proud of the work that our assessors have put into ensuring that people are placed in the most appropriate level of care and getting the treatment they need."

"Our goal with Same Day Access is to provide same-day appointments for individuals so we can get them in to services when they are motivated and willing to actively engage in treatment," adds Brosius. "Plus, we want to be sure that they are be-



**Connecting clients with care:** Jami Lovern, Access Liaison for NRVCS, responds to email while working in her Blacksburg office. The ongoing efforts of Lovern and other members of the agency's support team have been vital to the success of the Same Day Access program. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS)

ing placed in the most appropriate level of care for their particular situation."

While there may have been some stumbling blocks initially, Brosius says the SDA process has continued to evolve and improve to meet the needs of both consumers and referral sources. Being able to do this effectively, she adds, requires a true team effort. She is especially grateful for the efforts of NRVCS' support staff at both the main office in Blacksburg, as well as the agency's clinic in Pulaski - the two locations where SDA is currently available.

"The volume of individuals we may see

on a given day is totally unpredictable," continues Brosius. "There's just no way to know what to expect, but our support staff has done an incredible job of pitching in and helping us get through those busy times. We couldn't do it without them."

Jami Lovern, who serves as an Access Liaison at NRVCS' Blacksburg office, says most of what she has either heard or observed related to SDA has been positive.

"It's great to know that we're getting people in faster these days," Lovern says. "Honestly, I think some of our clients are astonished that they're getting to see someone so quickly."

Lovern, who has been with NRVCS for almost three years, adds that she's proud of the collaborative spirit that has gone into making Same Day Access successful.

"Clinicians and other staff are chipping in to help when we see those high-volume times," Lovern adds. "It's just a great team that we have."

"We're a well-oiled machine at this point," Lovern continues. "We might squeak every once in a while, but we know where the grease goes."

Individuals needing an initial assessment can call NRVCS at 961-8400 to schedule an appointment. Walk-ins are welcome on the following days:

**Blacksburg (700 University City Blvd.)**

Monday, Tuesday & Thursday from  
8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

**Pulaski (1042 E. Main Street)**

Monday, Wednesday & Thursday from  
8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

## Early feedback on Same Day Access...

*"I'm really grateful that I was able to be seen so quickly. I called and was able to schedule an appointment the next day at a time that was convenient for me...Mary was great. She gave me a perspective on my situation that no one had ever offered before...I'm in a much better place and I'm doing really well!"*

- Consumer of services

*"It went really well. I was in and out without any issues and I found the process very helpful."*

- Consumer of services



Virginia House of Delegates members Joseph Yost (left) and Nick Rush listen as Christiansburg Police Chief Mark Sisson (white shirt) voices concerns about the impact of current legislation associated with the state's psychiatric bed registry on his department. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS)

# Law enforcement stretched thin by state bed registry

## Current system draining resources from local law enforcement agencies

By Mike Wade / NRVCS  
mwade@nrvc.org

**CHRISTIANSBURG** - While it may have been designed with the best of intentions, current legislation attached to Virginia's Psychiatric Bed Registry is causing significant problems for local law enforcement agencies.

At a meeting hosted by the New River Valley Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) on September 19, chiefs and sheriffs from throughout the New River Valley voiced shared concerns about the bed registry's negative impact on their resources - in terms of both manpower and funding.

The registry's mandate to transport individuals deemed appropriate for hospitalization to the first available bed means officers from this area often find themselves traveling throughout the Commonwealth

- miles and hours away from facilities in their own region.

According to NRVCS' Patrick Halpern, Coordinator of the local CIT program, utilization of local (New River Valley and Roanoke) private psychiatric hospitals has decreased dramatically since the bed registry was first implemented in March 2014.

In fact, the number of adults subjected to a temporary detention order (TDO) who were placed in a local facility has dropped from 80% in early 2014 to now only 31% of TDO's between January and August of this year.

"The reduction in local psychiatric hospital bed utilization has resulted in a significant increase in the distance that New River Valley law enforcement agencies are required to travel in order to fulfill their statutory obligations for the transportation of individuals subject to a TDO," notes Halpern.

Data indicates that local law enforcement officers have seen a 120% increase in the average miles traveled per TDO transport since the bed registry began in 2014.

"This has resulted in real impacts for law

enforcement - including increased personnel and travel costs - as well as the quality of care for hospitalized individuals," Halpern adds.

Finding psychiatric beds for juveniles presents an even greater challenge.

"There are even fewer options for hospitalized minors and their families in Virginia," Halpern adds. "While juveniles account for just 13% of our TDOs, these TDOs represent 26% of the TDO-related miles traveled by local officers."

"These distances also make it difficult for many families to be actively involved with treatment," continues Halpern.

State legislators Joseph Yost and Nick Rush, who attended the meeting, expressed a desire to work with law enforcement on finding solutions to the problem.

In the meantime, NRVCS officials are proactively trying help alleviate some of these issues with the addition of Same Day Access and a mobile crisis team, as well as additional beds and TDO capabilities at the New Horizons Crisis Stabilization program, and enhanced peer support services.



700 University City Boulevard  
Blacksburg, VA 24060-2706

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## Lady Highlanders giving an assist to Special Deliveries

Head coach Mike McGuire and the Lady Highlanders women's basketball team at Radford University are lending their support to NRVCS' Special Deliveries program.

The team will conduct a "Diaper Duty Rally" during their home opener on Sunday, November 12, when the Radford women host Appalachian State. Tip-off at the Dedmon Center is scheduled for 5:00 p.m.

Fans are asked to bring unopened packages of children's diapers (all sizes needed) to the game. Diapers collected at the event will be stuffed into a campus police vehicle and then donated to families served by Special Deliveries, a program that provides services to pregnant women and new mothers who are also struggling with mental health and/or substance use disorders.

According to Special Deliveries Supervisor Cora Taylor, the program currently serves nearly 200 women throughout the New River Valley.

**RADFORD BASKETBALL**  
**NRVCS NIGHT**

# Diaper Duty Rally

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2017**  
**5:00 PM - DEDMON CENTER**  
**RADFORD, VA**

**HELP A MOTHER OUT!**  
Join us in stuffing a police car by  
donating a pack of diapers  
for your chance to win  
a Radford Prize Pack!



**WE HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!**