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Rehab facility's future uncertain

By *PATRICK MEIGHAN* Staff Writer

NASHUA – Nathan Goodwin, 30, didn't know where to turn.

Addicted, drinking, he tried to get into one rehabilitation program after another, only to be told there would be a wait of three or four weeks.

Afraid for himself and not knowing what else to do, Goodwin dialed 9-1-1.

He credits that call with saving his life.

Goodwin first was taken to a treatment center at Southern New Hampshire Medical Center – West Campus, and then went through a 14-month program at Keystone Hall. It was that time in Keystone Hall that helped him turn his life around, Goodwin said.

"It was just like a burden had been lifted," Goodwin said. "It was the first time I had seen people like me."

Goodwin started treatment in August 2008, shortly after he had returned to Nashua from California and a time when he was homeless, "couch surfing" among friends and family.

Recovered, he now is program manager of Connections, a peer support center run by Harbor Homes, a sister agency to Keystone Hall.

Keystone Hall will host a community forum at 6 p.m. Wednesday to discuss the program's future. The forum will be held at Harbor Homes, 45 High St., and is open to the public.

One purpose of the program is to gauge feelings about the needs for drug and alcohol treatment in the city, said Cynthia Andreola, community relations manager for Harbor Homes.

"We really want to hear what's working, what's not working, what are we missing, and at the same time educate the public about what the need is," Andreola said.

The forum comes at a time when officials are planning for Keystone Hall to move from its downtown location to potentially a new site in the western part of the city.

Keystone Hall, which has treated more than 11,000 people for addiction in its 20-year tenure, is located in a Pine Street Extension building in poor condition, Harbor Homes officials have said.

In 2009, Keystone Hall treated 663 people, and 70 men and 22 women are currently on the waiting list for one of the 28 available crisis center beds, officials said.

Harbor Homes has been negotiating to buy a building at 615 Amherst St. for Keystone Hall's new location, officials said.

"Last year, we turned away 1,000 people because of a lack of space, which can be heartbreaking," Andreola said.

It's difficult for someone to reach a point where he takes the step to call a treatment center, and then to be told there's a wait to get in "is not a good thing," Andreola said.

Goodwin knows that too well. There are only a handful of treatment programs in the state to begin with, he said.

The highly structured program at Keystone Hall – which manages clients' time – made the difference in turning his life around, Goodwin said.

"I had to relearn how to live," he said. "All I knew how to do was drink and take drugs."

Keystone Hall also helped him on the path to his position at Connections, as he started working there as a volunteer, then worked in accounts payable before starting as program manager in July of 2009.

"They believed in me when I didn't believe in myself," Goodwin said of the Keystone Hall staff.

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