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## Support group for mentally ill gets home

By *PATRICK MEIGHAN* Staff Writer

NASHUA – A center that provides peer support for mentally ill people now has its own home thanks to state funding.

The HEARTS Peer Support Center of Greater Nashua, which was formerly attached to Harbor Homes, will welcome the public at an open house Thursday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

The center is in Unit B at 5 Pine St. Extension in the Millyard area.

Its name is an acronym for “hope, empowerment, advocacy, recovery towards support.” It serves as an adult education wellness center, a place for people who suffer from mental illness to find support with peers each day between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., said Ken Lewis, the executive director.

HEARTS had been renting space from Harbor Homes, an agency that battles homelessness. It moved into its new center July 1.

HEARTS is the area’s first peer-driven support center for mentally ill people, Lewis said. The staff, volunteers and more than half the board of directors have or have had a mental illness, Lewis said.

Lewis used to be the director of Connections at Harbor Homes. Many of the Connections clients have issues with mental illness, or substance abuse, or both. The difference is that Connections is more focused on helping clients find jobs or build job skills, while HEARTS emphasizes support groups and programs that aid in recovery, as well as activities such as yoga, music therapy and light exercise.

The center also offers a telephone number they call a “warm line” manned by volunteers from 5-10 p.m. daily. The warm line number is 1-800-306-4334.

HEARTS also helps connect its members to mental health services, Lewis said.

Attending the open house will be Mayor Donnalee Lozeau, Dr. Hisham Hafez, executive director of the Greater Nashua Mental Health Center at Community Council, and other officials.

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