



**NATIONAL COMMISSION ON MILITARY, NATIONAL, AND
PUBLIC SERVICE
MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD**

Subject: Nashua Safe Stations Roundtable

May 10, 2018

The following is a record of a meeting with Commission staff and representatives from the Nashua Safe Station program, which took place on May 10, 2018 at the Arlington Street Community Center in Nashua, New Hampshire. At the meeting, participants discussed their experiences in collaborating to combat the opioid crisis in Nashua. The conversation was facilitated by Chairman Joe Heck, and included all Commissioners except Dr. Janine Davidson. This memorandum is not a verbatim transcript of the discussion.

Attendees:

- Commissioners: Chairman Joe Heck, Vice Chair Mark Gearan, Vice Chair Debra Wada, Tom Kilgannon, Shawn Skelly, Avril Haines, Alan Khazei, Steve Barney, Jeanette James, Ed Allard
- Commission Staff: Kent Abernathy, Keri Lowry, Paul Lekas, Annie Rorem, Jud Crane, Sandy Scott.
- Representatives from the Nashua Safe Stations initiative, including Mayor Jim Donchess, as well as other individuals noted below

Key Takeaways:

- Collaborative efforts among non-profits can create new solutions to community problems and new opportunities for individuals to serve their communities.
- Strong leadership can galvanize a community to use service to address a concern.
- National service opportunities can be expensive to pursue, with low stipends and high cost of training.

Meeting Discussion

Chairman Heck began the meeting by overviewing the vision and mission of the Commission, as well as the value of meeting with the assembled representatives of the Safe Station initiative—namely, what service initiatives look like at the grassroots level.

Chairman Heck asked, *“What is the inherent value of service to the community?”*

An AmeriCorps volunteer from the Public Health Department (and an Army veteran) explained she and most of her family are in recovery from drug addiction and that her current role “fell into her lap.” She further stated that she sees the value of service in providing an opportunity for human connection.

Mr. Khazei asked *what she does daily as part of the program at the Public Health Department and whether service has helped her in her recovery.*

The young woman responded saying she ensures that individuals—clients, as well as their families—know what resources are available. She identified her role as not just about making referrals, but also about holding clients’ hands through the process. She noted she is a peer and her clients trust her. She values service for the human connections that it facilitates.

Further, she stated, her service role has “100%” helped her in her recovery. She stated sharing her recovery experience is empowering, for both her and her clients, and explained, “I realize that I have a purpose and that I matter.” She reiterated the value of human connection, stating her opinion that it helps not just for recovery from drug abuse, but potentially also for depression or other hardship.

Chairman Heck asked *the representative from Volunteer NH when that organization got involved in addressing the opioid crisis in New Hampshire.*

The representative from Volunteer NH responded that that organization had started with state service planning—determining how to marshal and direct resources to address the problem—about 1.5 years ago, raising it as a state priority after speaking with a group of governors from across the country, shortly before the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) independently identified the opioid crisis as a priority. She explained that, at that time, they began touring the state to determine what national service resources were available and able to be directed toward the crisis.

Chairman Heck asked *whether service programs in Nashua had led to any individual finding full-time employment.*

The representative from Harbor Homes said there are lots of open positions and service has provided a springboard to get into them. He mentioned his organization had an application pending for 20 AmeriCorps volunteers, saying “We need help, and to me this is the cavalry.”

Chairman Heck asked *how Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Fire Stations are involved in the Safe Stations program.*

The representative from EMS explained that people are willing to come to Safe Stations because they know they will be treated in person, with respect, and without judgement. The representative from the Fire Department said people “actually thank us” on the way out, and clients state that they value the experience because they are “treated like humans.”

Mr. Kilgannon asked *how the Safe Station initiative has influenced the first priority of the Fire Stations—responding to fire emergencies.*

The representative from the Fire Department said this was a concern of the previous chief – taking resources from the Fire Department’s primary mission. The Fire Department initially identified a target of 15-minute turn around for participating in safe stations to minimize the impact on the station. The initial turnaround time averaged 11.5 minutes. The fire department’s average medical call [to respond to a medical emergency outside of the station] is a 30-minute turnaround. He continued that it was “eye opening” that a collaboration like Safe Stations could improve on that turnaround time, it was now 11.5 minutes to: receive the walk-in; conduct a medical survey; call a partnership service; finish processing and get the patient on their way. The representative later identified the short wait-time for assistance as a key success of the collaboration, opining that patients would not wait for an hour or two for assistance.

Mr. Kilgannon asked whether the representative from the Fire Department was familiar with other cities with similar initiatives.

The representative from the Fire Department explained that New Hampshire was the first state to launch such a program, and that the key to the whole thing is collaboration. He explained that the initiative partners and key stakeholders meet every two weeks.

Mr. Barney reflected on the value of trust and raised the potential for tension when individuals engaged in criminal behavior rely on public servants—upholders and defenders of the law—for assistance. He asked how the opioid crisis has impacted those addressing the problem.

The representative from EMS explained that many individuals consider the initiative a waste of time. He further identified that they work hard with the local police department (detail about their work with the police department were not clear) and that the value of using fire stations for the initiative is their visibility. As he explained, not everyone knows where their local recovery center is, but they do know where to find their local fire station.

Mr. Barney followed up on the “waste of time” comment, suggesting that their efforts are creating an ethos of service around a very challenging example. He further stated that the community is “at the edge of something very important” that the Commission is trying to understand.

The Fire Department representative responded that there is an educational piece to their work, in that they demonstrate to the community that everyone is affected by the abuse of opioids in Nashua.

The representative from the Public Health Department explained that Mayor Donchess was key in launching the initiative by leading a culture-shift. She further stated that his original effort to convene a taskforce around the opioid crisis allowed for education and training about abuse and addiction. This training went “across the board,” with non-profits, public services, and hospitals invited to participate. The training enforced that drug addiction is as chronic disease and also helped underscored the important of using that language in discussing and addressing it. She closed her statement by emphasizing the value of collaboration and a continuum of care to education – this is a “wicked problem” where solutions and assumptions have to come together around the same time.

Mr. Barney observed that education is also about communicating values.

The representative from Harbor Homes applauded Mayor Donchess’ vision and effort to build the collaborative, stating that “leadership matters.” He continued saying the Mayor had initially responded when the community had 14 deaths over 2 months from overdoses. The Harbor Homes representative further observed that leadership spurs volunteerism, and that the Safe Stations initiative is unique in his years of work in the non-profit sector. He further said the community always knew who the Fire/EMS/Police were, but they never really worked together side-by-side –

that was a form of messaging to others in the community and changed the culture across the city as a whole.

Mr. Gearan reflected on New Hampshire as an “interesting political space,” but observed that the success of the program is not one of politics, but one of leadership. He asked what Mayor Donchess would specifically recommend to the Commission.

Mayor Donchess observed that there were lots of people who wanted to serve their community and society – if they could be engaged and convinced to put aside their rivalries, then a lot may be accomplished. This took a group effort, if the community had not had a lot of people willing to help, the effort would not have gone anywhere.

Ms. James asked whether the participants had identified any barriers to service in Nashua or New Hampshire, and asked what they thought prevented people from giving their time.

The EMS representative noted, as a rural state, there are a lot of communities that rely on volunteers in fire and ambulance departments, but that employment constraints make it difficult for people to take time off to volunteer. He illustrated this statement using an example of an individual working at a fire station who might not be able to take time off from his job.

Chairman Heck mentioned the Commission had heard from business leaders about their experiences participating in days of service. He asked about the value to employers to have employees volunteer in their communities.

The representative from Volunteer NH explained that organization does extensive outreach to educate employers, and that many companies offer programs or time off for people to volunteer. However, even organizing how employees will spend that time can be a barrier. She stated Volunteer NH had developed a volunteer match program, which she described as a Craigslist for volunteer opportunities, combined with a social media platform. She explained the value of “social norming” in promoting volunteering (e.g., posting “I volunteered today,” on a social media platform). After describing her personal path to her role, she observed time barriers to service among single-parent families and among individuals who work full-time.

A representative from the mayor’s office suggested the importance of influencers, particularly parents, on young people. She explained the city had considered how best to promote volunteerism at the local middle and high schools, keeping in mind that some individuals must work to contribute to family income. She mentioned volunteer requirements for public school sports teams. Further, she stated, a lot of people want to be involved, but do not always know how. The mayor privileges communication, cooperation, and inclusivity.

The conversation then turned to concerns over the low stipend level for AmeriCorps volunteers, with the representative from the Public Health Department explaining their volunteers have had to apply for public assistance. This representative expressed her hope that, if possible, the Commission address this barrier. This particular volunteer added to these statements by offering the perspective that AmeriCorps is a great opportunity for someone like him, who does not have anyone else to support and is able to rely on family to assist, if necessary.

Chairman Heck asked what made him want to serve as an AmeriCorps volunteer right out of college, as well as the effect of student loan debt on his choices.

The AmeriCorps volunteer explained he had been looking for good job experience and to have an impact on the community. Expanding further on the minimal stipend, he stated, “Sometimes it feels like I’m doing something good but being punished for it.” He has applied for SNAP and lives

outside of Nashua to keep living costs down. He was almost unable to accept the opportunity before he found an affordable place to live.

He further mentioned how the education grant was a big incentive, and that his federal loans are in forbearance.

Mr. Allard asked how the public service representatives had gotten started at the Fire and Ambulance Departments.

Both the EMS and Fire Department representatives stated that it had been a lifelong dream.

Chairman Heck noted key themes from the meeting, including the importance of communication and leadership in catalyzing communities for action. He asked the participants: "If you were to write this report, what else would you want to put in there?"

Individuals noted the value of whole-of-community events and cross-connection and engagement to spread the word about service.

Vice Chair Wada asked whether the participants had observed any unexpected benefits from the program, or second- and third-order effects from the collaboration.

Individuals explained that collaboration across sectors had raised awareness of other types of service.

Mr. Barney asked for participants' perspective on mandatory national service, and connected it to the idea of sports team or graduation requirements for service.

The representative from the mayor's office expressed concern over implementing such a requirement, suggesting the importance of cultivating pride in community and a sense that everyone has a place in growing and shaping society.

Mr. Gearan asked individuals to share who they "bear" in their heads, encouraging them to serve (e.g., who their influencers were).

Individuals responded by citing their parents and family. One participant responded with a story about a college professor who encouraged him to make an impact upon graduation and to pursue a career later in life.