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Family member and volunteer for NAMI Vermont

Committee: Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs

February 11, 2015

Re: Mental Health Advocacy Day

Today I want to express my gratitude for Pathways VT. For those of you who don't know about Pathways, originally called "Pathways for Housing," it's an organization that started out-of-state in 1992 and came to VT in 2010. It is based on a "housing first" model, which is to provide housing first and then combine that housing with supportive treatment services. Housing is provided in apartments in the community.

My seriously mentally ill family member was among their first "clients." He was ready to be discharged from VSH again and discharge plans were not materializing. No one wanted him. He had previously been a Howard client and theoretically a CSAC client. I say theoretically because he would not go to their offices and they would not come to our home, at least not without formal agreement from him. Howard had provided him with housing and services after his first VSH admission, but he violated their conditions and they would not accept him this time around. (He was not willing to live with us at that time.) Finally his social worker at VSH found a solution; a new organization I had never heard of called Pathways for Housing.

Initially they didn't have an apartment for him, but they agreed to see him in motels until they did. He accepted their services almost immediately when they came to him with their special ways. Since then he's had Pathways apartments in Burlington and Barre. Last summer he moved into one we built for him at our place. He's been very ill and hospitalized several more times, but Pathways has stood by him. They never refuse to help him, regardless of damage done to apartments. Their housing is unconditional, as their caring seems to be.

When we first seriously considered financing a permanent home for him the first thing I did was ask Pathways if they could remain his provider. I learned they had established an office in Vergennes! They continue to provide services where he lives. His psychiatrist drives from Burlington to do house calls! We could not offer him this improved living situation without them, since my husband and I have to travel together fairly often and it's not safe to leave him alone for long.

I don't know what would have become of our loved one without Pathways VT. I deeply thank Pathways and those in state government who decided to make them part of our system of mental health care.