

Steve Broer

For the last 16 years I have been Director of Behavioral Health Services in a community mental health agency in Vermont, located close to the Canadian border, Northwestern Counseling & Support Services <https://www.ncssinc.org/>. We are one of 10 Designated Mental Health agencies service Vermont by geographic region.

This role involves oversight of crisis & mobile outreach services, an outpatient program, 5 residential programs, and community support programs for adults with severe mental illness, and an Integrated Health team working in primary care and specialty care medical practices. My Antioch experience certainly prepared me for this role and most recent challenges associated with COVID-19. Our team here has mobilized rapid changes for telehealth services in the Emergency Department and providers delivering care from their homes. This situation also highlights the inequities we see in the healthcare and provider systems. For instance, we see our staff working in residential settings taking the most risks and being paid the least. Fortunately, we were able to create some additional enhanced pay for those staff and prioritized their Personal Protective Equipment. We are observing and admiring the coping capacities of some of the most vulnerable in our community and also meeting individuals who have never sought services seeking our assistance. Conceptualizing and developing plans for how to deliver services when there are high restrictions & moderate restrictions as this pandemic expands and contracts in our community is a continuing challenge. Being part of a team is certainly a protective factor. We are doing more outreach with makeshift homeless shelters through our liaison work with positions embedded in law enforcement and we have our first therapy dog who goes out on calls with the Vermont State Police. COVID represents a challenge to serve in a leadership role as psychologists responding to such a largescale event and learn from others in our local community response.