



CREATING A COMMUNITY THAT SUPPORTS MENTAL HEALTH

Councilwoman Nann Worel and Summit County Mental Health Coordinator Aaron Newman talk about building a regional coalition to provide a full spectrum of mental health support

This article is the first in an occasional series spotlighting mental health initiatives in Park City and Summit County.

Last month, Aaron Newman was hired as the first mental health coordinator for Summit County. Mr. Newman and Nann Worel discussed how they intend to strategically address mental health countywide.

Park City Municipal Corporation: What is the history of the countywide initiative to improve mental health services?

Nann Worel: Well, a lot of us have been working on this issue for many years via a loosely affiliated group of nonprofits and governments. This year, in particular, it came to the forefront, rather tragically, with the death of two students in September from drug overdoses. Not long after, Park City School Superintendent Ember Conley convened a group of community leaders, who determined that the response should be a coordinated community effort with a "hub." Ollie Wilder from Park City Community Foundation formed a steering committee in January and served as coordinator until Aaron was brought on board.

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Aaron Newman: There were already a lot of existing programs and efforts, as Nann has described, but the programs were scattered about, and the efforts just weren’t being utilized or coordinated.

Worel: Both the Park City and Summit County Council agreed to allocate funds to seed the effort because we all understand that this needs to be a community initiative supported by multiple entities. Our coalition

of partners includes the City and County Councils, Summit County Police Departments, Summit County school boards, Valley Behavioral Health, and all sorts of other community members

and nonprofits. Luckily, Park City and Summit County nonprofits have always collaborated very well, each playing to their strengths to create a complete continuum of care.

PCMC: What is the most immediate need?

Newman: Right now, if someone is in crisis, they and their families really have two options, neither of which is great: they can call the police and have them treated at the jail or go to the emergency room. This may address the immediate crisis, but the waiting period





for treatment can be four months. There's a huge gap between crisis and care.

Worel: The problem is even more acute for indigent patients. I saw this firsthand when I worked for the People's Health Clinic; it was very frustrating trying to find beds for our underserved residents.

PCMC: Aaron, although you've only been on the job about a month, have there been any big surprises?

Newman: I didn't realize how stark the differences among the Summit County communities are. This diversity is both a challenge and an opportunity. Naturally, some of our programs may be a harder sell on the east side—not because residents don't need or want mental health services, but because the topic has not traditionally been openly discussed.

PCMC: How can you bridge this divide?

Newman: We're most successful when we go through existing channels. We have invited a council member from Kamas to join our steering committees, and we are working with the chair of the interfaith council to connect us to east side leaders as a means of providing a crucial line of information.

Worel: We also feel it's critical to include and engage members of our Latino community—which comprises 25 percent of our population. And this is a challenge we're excited to tackle.

Newman: I want to mention that we've had two people who work closely with the Latino community trained in [QPR](#), which is like CPR for mental health. QPR stands for Question, Persuade, Refer. Folks trained in QPR act as first responders for someone experiencing a

mental health crisis. This is a critical link in the response and treatment chain.

PCMC: Nann, how does the mental health initiative tie back to Park City Council's broader goals?

Worel: Our Council's mission is to create a [complete community](#), and the mental wellness of our residents is a critical element. This initiative reinforces Council's other priorities, especially Citizen Well-Being, Multi-Cultural Involvement, Affordability (including affordable housing, childcare, and transit), and the Preservation of the Environment. We recognize Park City isn't "driving the bus" on this initiative, but we want to be in the front passenger seat. If we don't have a healthy community, what have we got?

PCMC: What is the Health Department's role?

Newman: We're essentially the logistics hub, overseeing and coordinating the services and programs. A key part of our strategic plan (which we hope to complete by August) will be ensuring the effective and efficient allocation of resources, as well as coordinating grants and federal funding for mental health and substance abuse. With all of the players at the table, we'll be better able to reduce duplication and streamline delivery methods.

PCMC: What initial steps have you taken, and what do you envision for the next six months?

Newman: Last fall, the Health Department conducted a survey that helped identify coverage gaps—quantifying what had, up until now, only been anecdotal evidence. Kamas, for example, has few resources, but the survey illuminated a huge need there. (Fortunately, once the new county health center

in Kamas comes online, Valley Behavioral Health will provide services with the city.)

From the survey data, we've identified six strategic directives to help frame our efforts:

- Educate & Cultivate Awareness
- Increase Capacity & Access
- Improve Coordination of Treatment
- Build Community Partnerships
- Address Funding Gaps
- Engage with Latino Community

We've identified three phrases of program development:

- **Phase 1 (three months):** Right now, we're still collecting data and conducting a needs assessment. We're also rolling out any programs that can be quickly deployed. For example, we are expanding QPR training to a wider audience: we just confirmed that we will be training all North Summit School teachers on the platform in August, and we are working with PC Foundation to train a wide swath of nonprofits.
- **Phase 2:** Once we've completed the assessments and developed broad outlines for some programs, we'll be able to identify other initiatives that might be attainable but require more data, funding, and facilities. We'll also have a better understanding of what to measure—which key performance indicators reflect the community's needs.
- **Phase 3:** We'll evaluate Phases 1 and 2 and determine the viability of the various programs we've implemented. How do we sustain the new and expanded programs and levels of service? Some may take five years to be fully realized.

PCMC: What would you suggest to Parkites who are interested in helping or becoming involved?

Newman: Contact me directly if you are interested in serving on one of our committees, providing professional services, or helping in some other way. Once we've spoken, I'll have a better sense of why you are reaching out, your passion for the topic, and your skillset. We'll then determine together what role you might play in this effort.

PCMC: What would you suggest for someone who may need help or who has a friend or family member who may need help?

Newman: I would advise anyone to contact [Connect Summit County](#) for resources and referrals. I would also encourage everyone to download the [Safe Utah app](#) to their phones—either for themselves or to potentially help someone else in the future. The app can immediately connect you to the crisis line to speak with a real human, or—if you prefer—you can anonymously text. Students, especially, may prefer this second option.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and [Connect Summit County](#) is offering a [series of programs](#) all month-long.

