

Brightwater Health:

A Place of Healing and Hope

By Patrick Lapinski

The Human Development Center, the largest community mental health center in northern Minnesota, has rebranded as Brightwater Health. The Brightwater Health mission is to foster hope, resilience and recovery by providing integrated, culturally respectful mental health and addiction services. Their goal is to provide comprehensive integrated mental health and addiction services to people of all ages across Carlton, Lake and St. Louis counties in Minnesota and Douglas County, Wisconsin.

CEO Benjamin Hatfield, MSW, LICSW, LADC, loves the challenge of steering the organization through this current point in its 80-year history.

"We have a person-centered, holistic, integrated approach to services. We offer something that nobody else does in our area, the fact that anybody who comes into our organization for anything, has access to all our

services," says Hatfield. "Some people may come through and just see a therapist, but someone who's seen a therapist might have an employment problem, so they can access our employment program. Or, someone who's seen the therapist may have an issue with substance use and can access our substance use program. They have access to all that and vice versa, across all programs,"



"We pride ourselves in our innovation and looking at community need. Obviously in Duluth, we have some pretty visible community needs."

- BEN HATFIELD, CEO - BRIGHTWATER HEALTH



explains Hatfield. "I think that's what really makes us stand apart, because there's nobody else that does that. That sort of answers the question, who's eligible for services? Everybody!"

ORIGIN STORY

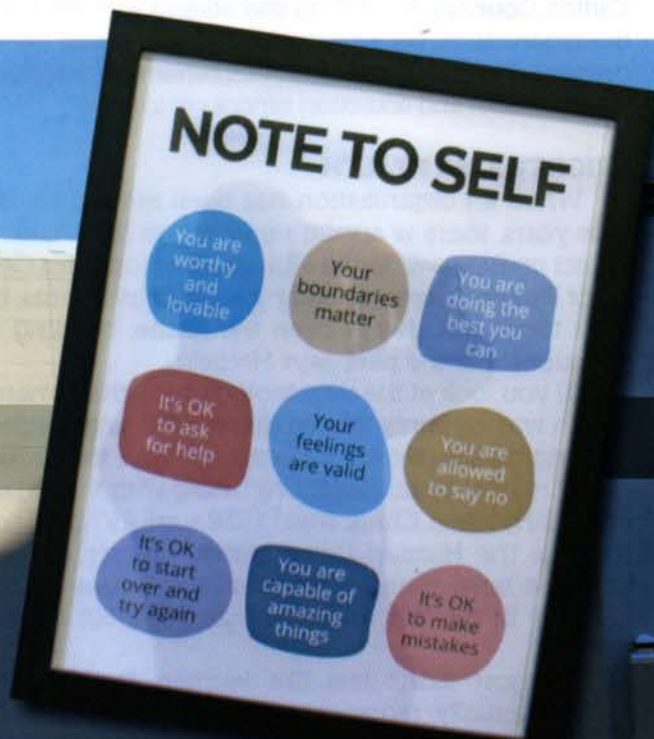
The decade of the 1930s are linked to one singular event in the history of our nation, the Great Depression. Even before the economic failures led to widespread unemployment and the uprooting of generations of Americans, the need for community-based mental health services was recognized. As Duluth reached its peak population in 1930, meetings about the proposed "Duluth Mental Hygiene Clinic" were first getting mentioned in the local newspapers. The coming dust bowl years would take its own toll on the population – increasing stress, anxiety and depression, reaffirming the need.

Interestingly, some of the main drivers for the clinic were from outside the mental health profession, particularly the Junior League of Duluth. An organization of socially minded women founded to provide services



of substance to the community. The JLD women were doers; they selected a cause, set their goals and went to work. It seemed obvious to this group of wives, mothers and professionals that mental health was tied to social welfare services. Focusing on improving the mental

water
HEALTH





health of everyone, young and old, was as important as developing the physical being.

In 1938, JLD members were directly involved in the formation of the Duluth Mental Hygiene Clinic, which "provided mental health support for children." By the late 1960s, services had expanded into Lake, Cook and Carlton Counties. In 1970, to stay abreast with the times, the organization became known as the Human Development Center, providing "comprehensive integrated mental health and addiction services to all ages."

BRIGHTWATER HEALTH

When an organization has been around for 80-plus years, there is a valid tendency to look back, to reflect on the past. As the Human Development Center of Duluth, there were many accomplishments, but their focus has always been the future, building on the success of the past, says Hatfield.

"If you look at the terminology back then, mental health was certainly treated differently," says Hatfield.

Brightwater Health has evolved with the growth of the mental health field, beginning with the Duluth Mental Hygiene Clinic from 1938 until 1970 when it became the Human Development Center. Hatfield says the term "human development," used in psychology in the '70s and '80s, has gone out of favor as well.

"We just didn't feel like Human Development Center actually represents what we are today. We were looking for a name that inspired a positive light, but also connected us to our community."

It took a long time, three years, for the steering committee to come up for the right name. "Brightwater, I felt, we all felt, over 90 percent of our staff agreed," noted Hatfield, "was a name that represented what we're doing. It connects us to our communities as well."

Brightwater Health employs around 300 people across multiple locations. Many work inside of several campus offices, but a large percentage are community-based. "We have lots of different providers that work in schools, co-responders to police departments who work in people's homes, helping with skills, helping people go out, get job interviews and things of that sort. So, we have community-based workers and in-office workers."

Brightwater Health has locations in Cloquet, Superior, Two Harbors and multiple community outreach centers. There are three main facilities in Duluth, including a recently added building, the downtown campus, at 120 W. 2nd St., a space that Hatfield says, "doesn't look that big from outside, but we have about 200 people working in that space and provide just about every service in one location. That's where people go if they need help."

Their Central Hillside facility at 810 E. Fourth St. is home to psychiatry and the mobile crisis team, and located in the East Hillside neighborhood is the administration and early childhood services building at 1401 E. First St. The Brightwater Health website has a complete listing of services for each location.

COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Lists can sometimes be difficult to wade through, but the list of services Brightwater Health offers is





comprehensive and shows how critical they are to the community. They have more than 25 different programs that include mobile mental health crisis services, Trauma-Focused Therapy, Therapy Services, Psychiatric Services, Community Support Programs, Adult Rehabilitation Mental Health Services, Crisis Response Services, First Episode Psychosis, Adult Case

Management, Employment Connection, Care Coordination, Drop-In Centers, Assertive Community Treatment programs, Homeless Program, Addiction Services, and Behavioral Health Home Services. Funding for these various programs includes third-party payors (public and private), grants (federal, state, private and local municipalities), and private contracts with community partners.

Additionally, Brightwater Health works closely with other service providers, including St. Louis County Public Health and Human Services, Duluth Police Department,



Cloquet Police Department, CHUM, The Union Gospel Mission, Damiano Center, The Salvation Army, Center City Housing, Life House, AICHO, Center for Alcohol and Drug Treatment, Northwood Children's Services, local hospitals and emergency departments, and Northeast Regional Correction Center to ensure that communities Brightwater Health serves all have access to resources.

Working in a direct partnership with the city of Duluth, Brightwater Health's Mobile Crisis Response Team continues having a big impact in Duluth and the surrounding region.

"It's pretty unique," admits Hatfield. "We pride ourselves in our innovation, and looking at community need. Obviously in Duluth, we have some pretty visible community needs, with homelessness, drug use and not enough resources available in the entire city for behavioral health. We worked with the county and the city and CADT (Center for Alcohol & Drug Treatment) and a couple other different partnerships for about 10 years. There was





a thing called the Clarity Project where they were trying to develop an urgent care or walk-in center, and it just wasn't going anywhere. So, we've partnered up with the county and the city and we're trying to make it happen. We provide that actual walk-in service care at 810 E. Fourth Street, where people can walk in without an appointment and get care, whether it's a crisis or they need resources. The center is run by our mobile crisis team."

The Mobile Crisis Response Team serves the entire region, from Carlton County up to Cook County. They respond to anybody who calls 988 crisis line, or any other crisis line. Last year the team responded to about 5,600 incidents. This program is partially funded through the city of Duluth.

DESTIGMATIZING MENTAL HEALTH

For many years, decades even, mental health was something people didn't talk about, at all. As a result, Hatfield believes people who were really in need and seeking care were probably people who were struggling with mental health issues on the fringes and everybody else kept it quiet. "I think that stigma stuck all the way up until

the '90s, when it started to destigmatize a little bit. In the 2000s we recognize that almost all people, at some point, struggle with some level of mental health. If you don't, at least a close family member or friend does, so people are reaching out," says Hatfield.

"In an organization like ours, we serve so many people in our community," continued Hatfield. "We serve from all classes, all walks of life. People are coming here for help, whether it's therapy or psychiatry or employment. And I do think still there is a stigma related to





mental health services in regards to, you know, 'I don't need help,' and we're trying to destigmatize that still."

As mental health treatment is becoming more widespread, the number of people seeking help has grown, and that growth is expected to continue. "During Covid-19, we saw a massive influx of people seeking support because of the isolation we all experienced, the anxiety we experienced, and in some ways, it was kind of traumatic for everybody," reasoned Hatfield. "When people just sat home and were with themselves without a lot of distraction, I think it was one of those times where people said, 'You know what? I really do need some more support.'"

Hatfield uses the experiences garnered during Covid-19 to deliver a message. "During a lifespan, everybody faces some mental health crisis, every human being, whether it's a transition, adjustment in life, divorce, loss of a job, loss of relationship, all of these things that people tend to say, 'Hey, I'll just take this on myself,' and you can't get that help through a friend or relationship because it isn't as objective as a third party helping you. We have a lot of programs and resources to help people."

FORWARD LOOKING AND SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION

Brightwater Health has a strong investment in their staff. "We want to make the provision of those services sustainable as well," says Hatfield, looking internally. "We have a strong investment in our staff and our clients."

Hatfield says that finding people isn't the hard part when it comes to employee recruitment, it's paying them a sustainable wage over the length of a career, with maybe a few perks in the mix. "We've done a lot of things – we have short work weeks. We pay a full-time salary to everybody working a 36-hour work week. We shoot for four-day work weeks, lots of flexibility; things of that sort to lower caseloads," says Hatfield. "We really limit caseloads so we can make sure every client is getting really good service from that person."

Therapists at Brightwater are required to have a master's degree in their area of specialty, but there are also bachelor's level positions that are staffed by practitioner providers.

Hatfield says it is important for people to feel like they can come in for help. With the uncertain future for health care on the horizon, Hatfield anticipates a shift in how mental health services are perceived.

"I think in the next five years, mental health care will be as synonymous as just going to get physical health care," states Hatfield, who also knows there are a lot of issues to address. "We're having a significant substance use issue across the entire country, and there's no difference here; it's rather acute. People are dying of fentanyl overdoses, and then we also



Left - Megan Kleiman, Brightwater marketing supervisor who toured the facility with The Duluthian.
Above - Brightwater 2nd St. location. Below - Brightwater 4th St. location.



have homelessness. It's an issue across our entire country, lack of housing," explains Hatfield, who says Duluth's homelessness issue is "awfully large for the size of the community, so it almost matches Minneapolis or other large cities. Also, being a border state, Wisconsin has very little human resources so, for a lot of people living in a twin city like this, people are going to migrate into Duluth, where there are more resources."

Hatfield wants to destigmatize the field of mental health. Circling back to the rebranding, Hatfield opened up about the stigma attached to many of their services.

"It's even one of the reasons why, in the name Brightwater Health, it doesn't say Brightwater mental health or behavior health. Behavior health and mental health is just a part of regular health care. We are really trying to destigmatize that with the name."

Hatfield believes that "one of our most pressing forward issues is to just let people know that it's normal and safe to come in and seek help like you would any type of physical health issue. Our future is to continue to expand our service delivery to more people, to be easily accessible."

Brightwater Health is recognized as a Certified Community Behavior Health Center. Nationally, CCBHC is an outpatient, integrated care model incorporating care coordination and using a cost-based payment methodology. Brightwater Health was the first in the state to become a Certified Community Behavior Health Center, as defined by the state legislature, and they are the only body in Duluth that has that designation. In essence, what that means is Brightwater Health, as a CCBHC, will provide services and all wraparound integrated services to anybody, regardless of their ability to pay. **D**

Patrick Lapinski is a freelance writer who grew up in Superior.

