

# N R V C S

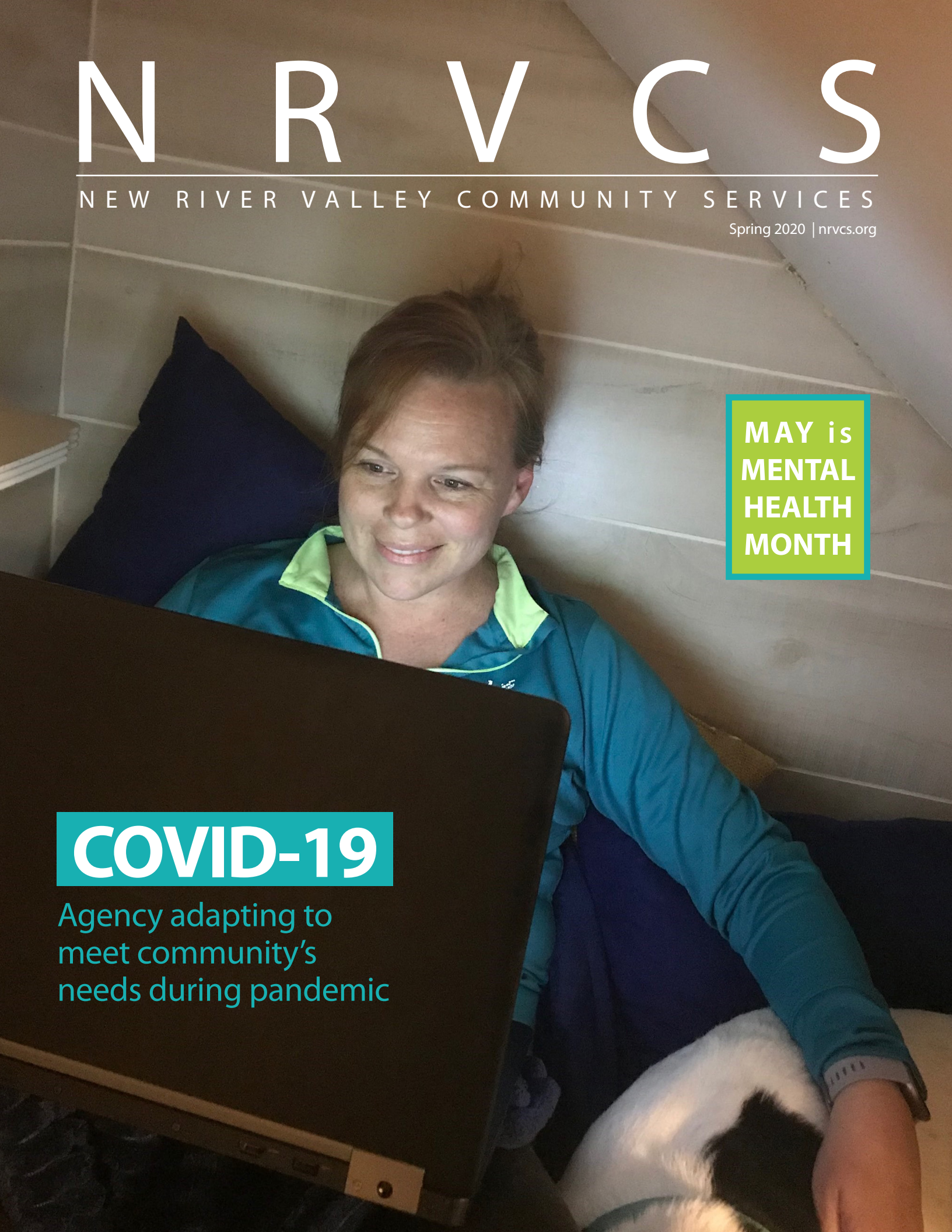
NEW RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY SERVICES

Spring 2020 | nrvcs.org

**MAY is  
MENTAL  
HEALTH  
MONTH**

## **COVID-19**

Agency adapting to  
meet community's  
needs during pandemic





# Telehealth: A story of technology and teamwork

**BLACKSBURG** - When it comes to community-based behavioral healthcare, the practice of utilizing telemedicine or “telehealth” to connect providers with patients is nothing new - particularly in rural areas where access to care can be limited.

Although it has been on a limited basis up to this point, NRVCS has used technology to remotely link individuals to services for decades. The equipment and technical quality of those interactions have obviously improved over time but no one could have predicted how crucial the capability to host an “online meeting” would become.

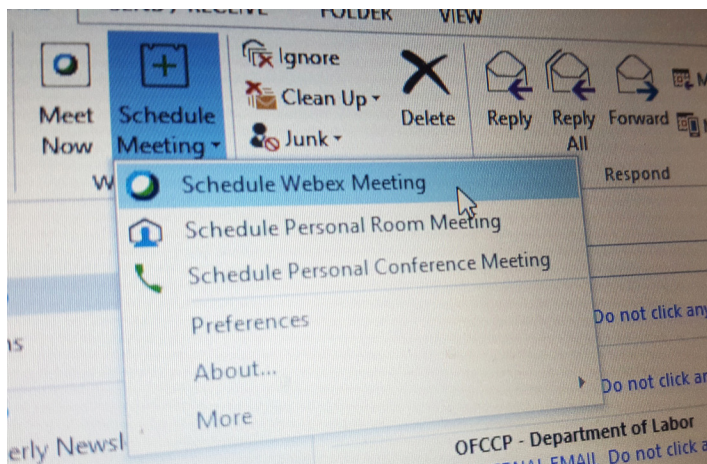
Fortunately for individuals in the New River Valley who need assistance with mental health and/or substance use disorders, the infrastructure of NRVCS’ technology was well-positioned to meet the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Chip Tarbutton, Information Technology (IT) Manager for NRVCS, the agency had migrated to a cloud-based phone system during Fiscal Year 2019 that made it possible to handle widespread use of telehealth.

“One of the reasons we went with the platform was because it had a robust web conferencing capabilities built in - which we had planned to use primarily for team meetings and for meetings with community partners in order to save costs of travel,” explains Tarbutton. “Up until recently, telehealth was used to connect a client of NRVCS in one of our clinics with a provider in one of the agency’s other locations.”

Tarbutton adds that another reason the agency chose the Cisco Webex platform is because Webex Meetings are compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), the federal law that mandates measures to help protect a person’s private health information.

He goes on to say that the web-based system also allows staff to manage phone calls remotely, and that it also includes team and individual chat functions to allow for communication throughout the work day. Both of these functions had already been in use prior to COVID-19.



**A “virtual” reality:** Employees at NRVCS are relying heavily on technology to provide services and engage with their clients during the COVID-19 pandemic. The same platform is also being used for meetings among staff and with community stakeholders. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS)

## Webex Meetings @ NRVCS

February 2020: 68

March 16 - April 21, 2020:  
8,602



“When the stay-at-home order went into effect back in March, the state gave us the option to use a platform to conduct telehealth with our clients so they could still access treatment safely from their homes,” continues Tarbutton.

He notes that Cisco allowed NRVCS to increase the agency’s licenses for Webex Meetings to accommodate the increased volume of usage. Tarbutton and his team also had to move up their timeline on some planned upgrades to the NRVCS network infrastructure to ensure there was adequate bandwidth to handle the huge increase in traffic. The IT team worked through the weekend of March 14 to get those upgrades completed.

Then came the hard part.

“Our biggest challenge was quickly training staff to use the platform in a way we hadn’t really foreseen,” adds Tarbutton.

A number of training initiatives were implemented to show staff how to fully utilize the suite of services available through Webex - including four large virtual meetings with over 100 staff attending each session. In addition, the IT staff also set up a training/resource page on the agency’s intranet to help staff become familiar with Webex. Tarbutton points out that this is all in addition to the ongoing help desk support available to staff.

The sudden increase in use of Webex Meetings and telehealth is clearly evident based on early numbers.

In February 2020, NRVCS staff conducted a total of 68 virtual meetings. Between March 16 and April 21, a total of 8,602 meetings were conducted with 410 hosts conducting 262,208 minutes of meetings, many of which were direct meetings with clients.

“Due to the hard work of the IT Department, we were in a position to leverage this technology,” Tarbutton says. “However, the biggest heroes here are our clinical staff - they fully embraced this change and made it a reality.”

“The IT team is incredibly humbled by the success of this initiative and appreciative of the staff for so readily using these tools to serve our community,” he continues. “We played a role in making it available, but the tools mean nothing without the hard work and dedication of our clinical staff who partnered with us to make this a tremendous success.”

## ON THE COVER

Caroline Mullins, a Behavioral Health Wellness Specialist with NRVCS, conducts a session of “Real Parent Talk Live” from her home in Blacksburg. The live chat is being offered weekly through the Buidling Strong Families page on Facebook ([facebook.com/BSFNrv](https://facebook.com/BSFNrv)). Mullins is also doing a weekly arts & crafts demonstration for families to try while they are home together. (Photo - Michael Mullins)

# “Mask Lady” at NRVCS steps up to help protect others

By Mike Wade / NRVCS  
mwade@nrvcs.org

**BLACKSBURG** - Shannon Raner has dedicated her career to helping others - including the past four years as a Registered Nurse with the medical services team at NRVCS.

So, when she first learned that the agency might not have an adequate supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, Raner - like all good heroes and heroines - quickly sprang into action.

And while she may not be able to fly or lift cars over her head, what Raner has done to support her coworkers definitely seems superhuman. As of April 30, Raner has personally made 420 face masks for NRVCS employees and clients - all on her own time.

“It goes a lot quicker now than it did in the beginning,” says Raner. “I usually sew for about an hour in the morning and then for about three and a half hours in the evening after dinner...I guess I can do about 20 masks in a day.”

Raner says NRVCS Medical Director Dr. Circe Cooke initially made her aware of the need for masks.

“At first, I started going around the office from door-to-door with an Easter basket - just handing out masks to folks who might want them,” she recalls. “I recognized it was something I could do to help.”

The thing is, Raner had never even tried to make a face mask prior to COVID-19.

“Well, I’m a crafter in general and I have done plenty of sewing,” explains Raner. “I’m also the type to see something I like that I’ve never done before, get the stuff and give it a go.”

Raner, who has become known as “The Mask Lady” to many of her colleagues, has purchased supplies for the masks out of her own pocket - except for the fabric itself, which was a ‘gift’ from her late mother-in-law.

“She was a quilter and I suppose that makes what I’m doing with the masks a little extra special for me,” Raner says. “I know ‘Mom Raner’ is smiling down from heaven knowing that she helped to create this kaleidoscope of color that’s helping keep people safe.”

A native of the Buffalo, New York area, Raner relocated to the New River Valley when her husband was transferred for work. She’s paid her dues in her 20 years as a nurse - beginning her career as a home health aide and then going through the progression of being a CNA and LPN before earning her RN.

“Nurses are fixers - we like to fix things - and I like being the calm in the middle of chaos,” she adds. “I like to feel like I’m helping at a time when a lot of people feel really helpless.”

Raner has worked long enough in mental health that she can recognize working on the face masks is also helping her manage her own well-being during the pandemic.

“It’s a coping mechanism for me,” explains Raner. “I’m sure it’s kept me from experiencing the level of fear and anxiety that some of my co-workers are dealing with.”

Raner, who has transitioned into an integrative care role with NRVCS, says she has been impressed with how quickly the agency has adapted to meet the needs of the community despite the challenges of COVID-19.

“If there’s a positive that comes out of this situation, I think what we’re doing with telehealth is really transforming the way we provide care,” she notes. “It’s a neat, new opportunity for NRVCS and



**A creative way to help:** Shannon Raner, a Registered Nurse at NRVCS, holds one of the more than 400 face masks she has made for her coworkers and clients in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. (Photo - Ashley Wilson /NRVCS)

I think it’s great to be on the ground floor of that.”

Raner admits she misses being able to go shopping - and especially misses her visits to local thrift stores. With that not currently being an option, she says she and her husband are busy with cleaning out closets and doing home improvement projects. She’ll also continue to make face masks, as long as there’s a need.

“The gratitude I get from co-workers really makes it all worthwhile,” continues Raner. “When I walk around and see people wearing them, it really makes me feel good.”

“You know, we all got tossed into this together...but working together makes the load lighter,” she adds. “I don’t just see this as protecting the health of my co-workers, or our clients, but the agency as a whole.”

Raner is quick to point out that making hundreds of face masks doesn’t necessarily make her a hero - and that each of us has an opportunity to do something positive.

“Don’t limit yourself - one person really can make a difference,” she says. “I mean, I had never made masks before, but I figured it out.”

“...It’s a reminder that we should never be afraid to venture down a new path,” Raner concludes, “because when we get to the end of that path, we might just find that what we discover is something amazing.”



# Stories of hope & success in midst of COVID-19 pandemic

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us all to change how we do many things - and perhaps made some of those more challenging - we are also discovering successes as we continue to adapt to our new "normal!"

With that in mind, we wanted to share some of those successes with our readers, along with thoughts from some of our team at NRVCS:

*"I have a positive MAT (Medication Assisted Treatment) story. A client that was discharged from New Life for failure to follow rules, then discharged from [Recovery] Dojo due to multiple no-shows and being late. She was then picked up by case management/peer supports. Same issue of no-shows and being late continued with these programs and she was about to be discharged from everything. But over the past several weeks, she has seen her case manager, the peer specialist, individual counseling and met with Dr. Wilson. So, we took the barrier of transportation away and she is now receiving care.*

*Also, we have multiple clients with small kids, so telehealth has been a benefit due to not having to find child care."*

**- Erin Gresham, R.N., B.S.N. - MAT Program Supervisor**

For the last year and a half, Intensive Community Treatment (ICT) staff has worked closely with an individual who has resided at Fairview Home since her transition from the psychiatrist hospital. The client's long-term goal has been to move out of Fairview and live on her own.

This individual has been working on skills and therapeutic techniques to assist her with preparing to live out in the community in her own apartment. ICT staff have continued to assist her, even with the COVID-19 restrictions in place, to coordinate with applying to apartments in the area and she recently has been approved for an apartment. She is looking forward to moving out and living in her community. Staff have supported the client to strengthen her familial support system and to ensure a smooth transition out in the community.

ICT staff have assisted another Fairview resident who also recently expressed interest in living in his own apartment. ICT staff have supported and coordinated with the client to apply to apartments in the area, and advocated for approval with his legal history. ICT staff have been challenged with the recent obstacles of COVID-19 precautions to think outside of the box in order to complete the application process.

This client also recently re-connected with his family members and has overcome many obstacles with the supports of ICT services. This individual has been approved for an apartment and is looking to move out of Fairview by the end of June. Even with the precautions of COVID-19, ICT staff continue to provide essential services to individuals in the community who live with serious mental health disorders.

*"...Offering staff the flexibility to telework in order to continue seamless operations...Unwavering support from the Executive Director, Directors and the Admin Team."*

**- Eva Duncan, Program Services Lead - Reimbursement**



*"I had a client who was skeptical about using Webex video to communicate with each other. In order for me to make them feel comfortable, I decided to play 'Connect Four' online with them during our first scheduled Webex meeting. My client enjoyed it so much that he wanted to play Connect Four the entire scheduled time! After that, I would try to have something entertaining for my client to keep them engaged during our meeting.*

*One day, the client's mother texted me saying my client told her he looks forward to speaking with me. The client's mother even expressed that she feels like it benefits him, especially during COVID-19 since he doesn't get to interact with his peers. Now, my client and I continue to have fun through reading stories, listening to music, playing games, and much more!"*

**-Nicole Brito, Service Program Assistant, Clinical Services**

## Other highlights:

- NRVCS Emergency Services was able to negotiate telehealth with four emergency departments, two local inpatient psychiatric facilities, remote commitment hearings, and remote video with local magistrates.
- Our crisis stabilization unit (New Horizons) continues to provide residential in-person support for those in need of psychiatric care, helping to divert many from entering local emergency rooms and also reduce admissions to psychiatric facilities, thus avoiding having to travel across the state to access inpatient beds.
- We are currently working with local law enforcement to navigate in-field pre-screenings using Webex, and have already set up this capability with several local jurisdictions.
- The NRVCS Mobile Crisis Team is working with emergency services to assist in diverting individuals from hospitalization, so they may receive treatment in their home whenever possible.



# #Tools2Thrive

- ✓ Owing Your Feelings
- ✓ Finding the Positive
- ✓ Eliminating Toxic Influences
- ✓ Creating Healthy Routines
- ✓ Supporting Others
- ✓ Connecting with Others

While 1 in 5 people will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, everyone faces challenges in life that can impact their mental health. The good news is there are practical tools that everyone can use to improve their mental health and increase resiliency – and there are ways that everyone can be supportive of friends, family, and co-workers who are struggling with life’s challenges or their mental health.

This May is Mental Health Month and NRVCS is highlighting #Tools2Thrive – what individuals can do daily to prioritize their mental health, build resiliency in the face of trauma and obstacles, support those who are struggling, and work towards a path of recovery.

One of the easiest tools anyone can use is taking a mental health screen at [mhascreening.org](http://mhascreening.org) when they need answers. It’s a quick, free, and private way for people to assess their mental health and recognize signs of mental health problems.

This May, we are also exploring topics that can help you build your own set of #Tools2Thrive – recognizing and owning your feelings; finding the positive after loss; connecting with others; eliminating toxic influences; creating healthy routines; and supporting others – all as ways to boost the mental health and general wellness of you and your loved ones.

When it comes to your feelings, it can be easy to get caught up in your emotions as you’re feeling them. Most people don’t think about what emotions they are dealing with but taking the time to really identify what you’re feeling can help you to better cope with challenging situations.

It’s ok to give yourself permission to feel. We also know that life can throw us curveballs – and at some point in our lives we will all experience loss. It may be the end of a relationship, being let go from a job, losing a home, or the death of a loved one. It is natural to go through a grieving process. By looking for opportunity in adversity or finding ways to remember the good things about who or what we’ve lost, we can help ourselves to recover mentally and emotionally.

It also is true that connections and the people around us can help our overall mental health – or hurt it. It’s important to make connections with other people that help enrich our lives and get us through tough times, but it’s equally important to recognize when certain people and situations in life can trigger us to feel bad or engage in destructive behaviors.

Identifying the toxic influences in our lives and taking steps to create a new life without them can improve mental and physical health over time. And we know that work, paying bills, cleaning, getting enough sleep, and taking care of children are just some of the things we do each day – and it is easy to be overwhelmed. By creating routines, we can organize our days in such a way that taking care of tasks and ourselves becomes a pattern that makes it easier to get things done without having to think hard about them.

For each of us, the tools we use to keep us mentally healthy will be unique. But NRVCS wants everyone to know that mental illnesses are real, and recovery is possible. Finding what work for you may not be easy but can be achieved by gradually making small changes and building on those successes.

By developing your own #Tools2Thrive, it is possible to find balance between work and play, the ups and downs of life, and physical health and mental health – and set yourself on the path to recovery.

For more information about Mental Health Month, visit [www.mhanational.org/may](http://www.mhanational.org/may).



# 1 IN 5

people will experience a mental illness during their lifetime.

However,  
**EVERYONE**  
faces challenges in life that can impact their mental health.







**Spectrum Brands helping keep NRVCS clients, staff safe:** Sean Raines, Senior Director of Marketing for Spectrum Brands in Blacksburg, poses for a photo with Kara Clemons, Quality and Risk Management Lead for NRVCS. Sean delivered two cases of Spectrum-produced hand sanitizer (122 bottles in all) to the NRVCS Montgomery Center in Blacksburg on Monday, April 27. We are incredibly grateful for this generous donation from Spectrum Brands and appreciate their help in keeping our employees and clients safe. We are all in this together!. (Photo - Leslie Sharp/NRVCS)

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