



Overview

Norwich Community Nurse, Inc. (NCN, Inc.) is a nonprofit organization based in Norwich, Vermont that provides free health care coordination for all Norwich residents. Organized in 2019, NCN, Inc. hired its first nurse in April 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 shutdown. Since that time, a variety of vital services have been provided to people in the community.

The role of a community nurse includes promoting physical and mental wellness, including disease prevention, and filling in multiple gaps in health care services for individuals and families. Most often, the nurse assists individuals with their personal health issues, supports family members who are navigating the local health care system, and connects people to resources and services to help them to manage an illness. The nurse does this by making home visits, responding to email and phone calls, and holding office hours in town. Some clients have isolated needs while others require ongoing support. There is no charge to Norwich residents for this service. Funding for this part-time position is provided by generous donations from foundations, other nonprofit organizations, and private individuals. The administration of NCN, Inc. is also supported by a dedicated board of directors, including health care professionals and other caring community volunteers.

NCN, Inc. engaged in a 6-month strategic planning process between August 2022 and January 2023 to identify strategic priorities for the calendar years of 2023 and 2024. The following framework reflects a community-informed process that focuses on increasing its impact across Norwich and improving organizational sustainability looking to the future.

The 2023 NCN, Inc. board of directors includes Ellen Gnaedinger, DNP, APRN (President), Brenda Haynes, BS (Secretary), Cara Liu, MD (Treasurer), and Cheri Mather, MD. Ann Waterfall and Charlie Buell, Director of Norwich Aging in Place, participate as active community representatives.

Mission and Vision

Our mission: The Norwich community nurse provides free services to our residents through assessment and coordination of care, education and access to resources to fill gaps in the healthcare system.

Our vision: Better health in Norwich

History of NCN, Inc.

2019: The Norwich Community Nurse, Inc. began as a steering committee in 2019 by several members of the Norwich Congregational Church who recognized a need for additional health care services in concert with the local institutions and providers. The committee met for a year with the goal of hiring a community nurse who would be a resource for all Norwich residents. The Upper Valley Community Nurse Project (UVCNP) provided start-up guidance and financial support. Associated with the UVCNP were seven towns in the Upper Valley with established community nurses who helped guide the creation of the position in Norwich.

In November 2019, NCN, Inc. became an incorporated entity with a four-member board and two adjunct community participants. Through generous grants from the UVCNP, the Jack & Dorothy Byrne Foundation, the Woodworth Fund of the Norwich Congregational Church, and several private donors, enough money was collected to hire a community nurse at 10 hours a week.

2020: Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and worldwide shutdown in March 2020 the NCN, Inc. board of directors hired the first nurse on April 22, 2020. She left after two months, citing personal reasons. After the nurse's departure board members answered questions from the community, distributed adaptive equipment and held a flu vaccination clinic in October, administering doses to 28 residents.

2021: After six months of searching, 2021 began with the hiring of a second nurse at the end of January. In addition to working 10 hours a week for NCN, Inc., she also worked part-time as a nursing instructor. During the year, she had 54 client contacts: 51 were calls and emails from residents. Three people visited her in the church. She also assisted Rescue Inc. in vaccinating 22 home-bound seniors for COVID-19. There were no home visits during the year. In November 2021, the second nurse resigned to take a full-time hospital position. Two board members filled in answering another 24 emails sent to the Norwich Community Nurse email account, mostly asking for information about COVID testing, COVID and flu vaccines. Additionally, Ellen Gnaedinger did home visits for a homebound client in January and February of 2022.

2022: The NCN, Inc. board of directors hired its third nurse on January 18, 2022. Over her nine-month tenure, she focused on expanding in-person connection with Norwich residents. The Norwich

Congregational Church kindly allowed the nurse to meet with residents on a drop-in basis on Tuesdays from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. On the last Tuesday of every month, the nurse is stationed at Norwich Senior Housing for two hours. In October, she left the organization, and the board hired an experienced community nurse who also works part-time as a community nurse in Lyme, NH.

NCN, Inc. has faced unique challenges over the past three years. Starting a nonprofit organization during a global pandemic has been challenging. For example, social distancing initially greatly reduced the visibility and availability of the nurse. Despite the pandemic, communication between the Norwich community and the nurse was made through listserv postings, email, phone calls and word-of-mouth referrals. The community nurse now has a real presence in the town with office hours at the Norwich Congregational Church and Norwich Senior Housing and through home visits.

The intent of the NCN, Inc. board of directors is to create a service that fills gaps in the current health care delivery system. The pandemic has clearly demonstrated shortcomings in the system and reflects a direct need for a community nurse, especially because at this time most providers and hospitals in the region are no longer accepting new patients. As a result, many community members, including residents of Norwich, simply do not have adequate physical and mental health care for themselves or appropriate support to enable their care for family and friends. This crisis will continue for the foreseeable future.

The board of directors recognizes that the need already exceeds the ten hours that has been budgeted for the nurse's position. Despite the financial and administrative challenges that this presents, the board of directors is committed to securing and potentially expanding the community nurse's role in Norwich.

For more information about NCN, Inc., please visit the website at norwichcommunitynurse.org. To learn more about other community nurses in the Upper Valley region, please visit the Community Nurse Connection's website at www.uvcnp.org.

NCN, Inc.'s Strategic Planning Process

In August of 2022, a group of Norwich community members with extensive knowledge and experience in community health initiated a comprehensive strategic planning process to determine the next set of priorities for Norwich Community Nurse, Inc. Led by the board of directors, this working group included board members Ellen Gnaedinger, DNP, APRN (President) and Brenda Haynes, BS, RN-retired (Secretary); community nurses Kathy Watson, BSN, RN and Brenda Moore, RN; and community members Linda Cook, EMT, Elizabeth J. McKinstry, BSN, MA, Martha Nelson, BSN, MN, ARNP, Janine Scheiner, PhD, Psychology, and Ann Waterfall. Jill Marshall Consulting was contracted to facilitate the process.

Over six months, the group engaged in a four-phase process that included: (1) building a planning process to fit NCN, Inc.'s needs, (2) gathering feedback from key stakeholders across Norwich and the greater Upper Valley, (3) developing the organization's vision with a focus on identifying specific goals, strategies, and key results to achieve in 2023-2024, and analyzing additional opportunities to inform longer-term outcomes, and (4) adopting the plan and communicating the vision to NCN, Inc.'s supporters, clients, and the greater Norwich community.

Stakeholder outreach and additional assessment included:

- Discussions with board members and key advisors (5 responses)
- A paper survey for recent clients (8 responses)
- A paper and online survey for community leaders with direct interaction with or knowledge of the health-related needs in the community (8 responses)
- A paper and online survey for all community members across Norwich (234 responses)
- Discussions with other local community nurse projects (2 responses)
- Review of other regional community nurse websites, the 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment sponsored by Dartmouth-Hitchcock, Alice Peck Day Memorial Hospital, and Visiting Nurse and Hospice for VT and NH, *Filling the Gaps: In Support of Aging* (a paper by Sarah Jo Brown, RN, PhD and Laurie Harding, RN, MS), the NCNP's by-laws, and results of a community-wide survey conducted by NCN, Inc. in 2019.

Between August 2022 and January 2023, the board and staff members met three times to inform and guide the process, and the entire working group engaged in two, half-day sessions. The final plan was approved by the NCN, Inc. board of directors in March 2023.

NCN, Inc. is grateful to the Norwich community for the strong level of interest and response to its outreach during this strategic planning process. Many neighbors shared detailed comments and suggestions. In addition, the board of directors extends its gratitude to the volunteers who shared their expertise and time as part of the working group behind this process: Linda Cook, EMT, Elizabeth J. McKinstry, BSN, MA, Martha Nelson, and Janine Scheiner, PhD, Psychology. Lastly, NCN, Inc. thanks the Vermont Community Foundation for the funding to support our first-ever strategic planning process. Its generosity has provided an exciting road map for our future.

Goals, Strategies, and Key Results for 2023-2024

Now in its fourth year, NCN, Inc. recognizes the positive impact that increased health care coordination can create in the Norwich community, and also the work yet to be accomplished. As our community moves beyond the immediate effects of COVID-19, the NCN, Inc. board is eager to embrace a forward-facing vision and the opportunities ahead.

The nurse's services during 2022 reflect an increasing need for education, resources, and health care coordination in Norwich. The nurse served 59 residents during the course of the year for a total of 343 interactions, including home visits, phone calls, and emails. Fifty-three people, or nine out of every ten residents served, were new clients this year.

The most frequent interventions included:

- Emotional support
- Education or assistance with symptom management
- Education or assistance with COVID-19
- Education or assistance with medications

- Education or assistance with medical equipment
- Education or assistance with social risk factors such as food, housing or transportation
- Referrals to other community and social service agencies

The most frequently reported outcomes from the nurse's services included:

- Reduced anxiety or worry for clients' caregivers
- Enabled clients to remain safely at home
- Reduced clients' risk of falling
- Reduced clients' social isolation
- Improved clients' understanding of medications
- Prevented clients' hospitalization or visits to the emergency department¹

The strategic planning process cemented the board's resolve to serve its neighbors with knowledge and compassion. Perhaps most importantly, stakeholder engagement in the fall of 2022 emphasized the need for a community nurse program in town. The community-wide survey alone indicates a high level of need in Norwich related to health care support:

- Almost 40% of people who responded to the survey can identify someone in town who needs support with a chronic mental, physical and/or substance abuse issue
- 22% shared that they are not able to adequately care for themselves or their loved ones and need additional resources
- 37% need help navigating the medical system
- 34% need more information about advanced care planning
- 45% are interested in learning more about end-of-life planning

At the same time, many community members shared that they are not familiar with NCN, Inc. or the important role that a community nurse can play. The people surveyed weren't familiar with the services of a community nurse. For those who have used the nurse's services, clients reported that they appreciate the useful information, patient guidance, and caring support that was provided at no cost to them.

The following goals reflect the priorities proposed by the strategic planning group to grow NCN, Inc.'s impact through community-focused initiatives and strategic relationships.

Goal 1: Increase the well-being of Norwich residents by improving health care coordination managed by the community nurse. The steps taken over the last three years have provided insights needed to expand and increase NCN, Inc.'s impact in the community. We will address wellness needs, including mental health, as communicated by Norwich residents.

Strategies to achieve this goal include:

- Ongoing support of town residents by the community nurse via home visits, phone calls and email.
- Maintain a medical equipment bank.
- Organize at least one presentation open to the community each year on topics requested by residents, including end-of-life decision making.

¹ For more information about services in 2022, please see the REDCap report attached as an appendix.

- Share timely information about current health challenges through regular outreach to the listserv, community groups and the Norwich Community Nurse website, <https://norwichcommunitynurse.org>.
- Recruit local professionals to volunteer and share their expertise.
- Include more mental health resources on our website and in our written material, and consider how to better reach the younger population.
- Consider an annual survey of the Norwich community to continue to understand our neighbors' health care coordination needs.

Key results desired:

- Residents who use NCN, Inc.'s services report an increase in knowledge that enables them to better care for themselves, their families, or their neighbors.
- More residents report that NCN, Inc.'s services are based on timely and relevant community needs.
- The community experiences a decrease in emergency calls to the community nurse, police, fast squad, and primary care providers.

Goal 2: Raise community awareness of NCN, Inc.'s services by strengthening our communications. It is vital to deepen community engagement and increase our neighbors' appreciation for the importance of a community nurse program. We will improve our visibility and connect more people to our services.

Strategies to achieve this goal include:

- Share information about services and highlight recent successes through regular electronic outreach to the listserv, community groups, VNA, doctor's offices and the NCN, Inc. website.
- Update the website to include a list of frequently asked questions about the NCN, Inc.'s services and promote this messaging in other ways.
- Develop additional outreach to engage residents who are not technologically savvy.

Key results desired:

- More residents inquire about the nurse's services over the next two years.
- More residents visit the NCN, Inc.'s website over the next two years.
- More residents understand the role of the community nurse and the other services offered by the NCN, Inc.

Goal 3: Address community needs through additional connections with other service providers and organizations serving Norwich. We value the power of collaboration and bringing people together to find support and solutions. We will seek opportunities to leverage expertise in our region to support our neighbors.

Strategies to achieve this goal include:

- Attend events and meetings to share information about NCN, Inc.'s services.

- Promote other organizations' events that are of interest to Norwich residents based on the priorities expressed by clients and in our annual survey results.
- Expand and promote the list of community resources listed on the NCN, Inc. website.
- List NCN, Inc. contact information in print and online resources for the town and region.

Key results desired:

- NCN, Inc. has a more robust list of community services that is shared with Norwich residents.
- More service providers and organizations refer residents to NCN, Inc.
- More residents report that they are familiar with NCN, Inc.'s services.
- More residents contact the nurse for help.

Goal 4: Improve NCN, Inc.'s sustainability by increasing financial and volunteer support. Our future hinges on our ability to find the resources we need to operate. We will build our internal capacity to grow in our financial sustainability and empower a talented board and professional staff.

Strategies to achieve this goal include:

- Recruit additional board members.
- Develop training and materials for new board members.
- Identify new funding sources and seek regular financial support from individuals and local businesses and grantmakers.
- Review and update organizational bylaws.

Key results desired:

- At least two new board members join NCN, Inc. over the next two years and are properly oriented.
- NCN, Inc.'s presentations, materials, and community nurse compensation are supported and/or sponsored by more funders and we retain their support into the future.
- NCN, Inc.'s governance materials are up-to-date and reflect recent organizational growth.

Accountability and Monitoring

Successful implementation of NCN, Inc.'s strategic plan will require periodic and intentional review of its progress. Over the next two years, the board of directors will revisit its goals, strategies, and key results and will seek feedback from community members. The board will discuss and assess its next steps at each board meeting.

Key Risks

The following key challenges have been identified for NCN, Inc. and may affect the successful implementation of the goals outlined in this plan. As possible, the NCN, Inc. board of directors will manage its resources to mitigate these risks.

- *Limited financial resources:* As a 501(c)(3), NCN, Inc. is entirely financed by support from the local community, including individual donors and grantmakers. The NCN, Inc. board of directors has

asked for financial support through an annual appeal, grant applications, and online donations via our website. It is critical that the greater Norwich community continue to give money to sustain and increase this nonprofit organization's impact. The ability to ask for help is limited by the volunteer time of the current board of directors who are also managing the day-to-day operations of NCN, Inc. To mitigate this risk, the board of directors has asked for and will receive support in the next fiscal year from the Town of Norwich, and will continue to raise awareness of its mission and activities to motivate others to give. The community nurse's free services are available for and valuable to all Norwich residents.

- *Constrained human resources:* NCN, Inc. is committed to improving the wellbeing of its neighbors in Norwich. At this time, services are limited by a small working group of volunteers and a part-time community nurse. NCN, Inc.'s ability to meet its strategic plan goals depends on the capacity and skill set of its staff, board members, and other volunteers. NCN, Inc. is seeking additional board members and other volunteers who can commit to supporting the strategic and operational needs of the organization. Interested community members are encouraged to contact NCN, Inc. for more information.

**For more information about the Norwich
Community Nurse Project, please contact us.**



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