

The Queen City's Collective and Compassionate Approach

Fighting Opioids and Homelessness in the Granite State

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“Overdose deaths in Manchester up 13% year-to-date.”¹ This August 2019 headline in the *New Hampshire Union Leader* stung Mayor Joyce Craig, who, in the second year of her term, was still confronting a worsening opioid crisis. A 2018 study found that Manchester, despite representing only 8 percent of the state’s population, accounted for 25 percent of the deaths from opioid overdoses.²

When President Trump declared the opioid epidemic a public health emergency in October 2017, New Hampshire had the second-highest rate of opioid overdose deaths in the country.³ Lisa Marsch of Dartmouth’s Geisel School of Medicine blamed this on “the types of drugs that permeate the state, geography, and limited addiction resources outside major urban centers.”⁴

The Queen City’s chronic homelessness problem was also getting worse: one report cited that 1,500 individuals in Manchester were homeless and noted the rising cost of housing as a factor.^{5,6} It also found that the City’s size and available support services actually contributed to the issue, making it attractive to people in need of services from neighboring communities, which in turn engendered further ill will towards the homeless.

Craig knew she needed to enact changes to tackle these worsening crises. However, she lacked the resources and authority required to attempt unilateral solutions. New models of engagement and collaboration were necessary for her to make progress on these separate issues.

An unabashed Democrat in a purple stateⁱ and self-described idealist, Craig was a consummate underdog. She started by explicitly linking the issue of opioid misuse to the issue of chronic homelessness in the City of Manchester. Early in her campaign, she issued a comprehensive plan, “*Safe Streets, Opioid Crisis and Recovery Services Plan*,” which promised to “improve services that combat the opioid crisis” and to “develop and implement a comprehensive plan to address chronic homelessness.”⁷ These plans, however, went beyond the scale of a medium-sized city in New Hampshire. If she was serious about making good on her promises, Craig needed to forge new partnerships and approaches to advance her bold vision.

ⁱ A “purple” or swing state refers to an American state that is narrowly divided along political lines between Democrats and Republicans, and where elections are often quite competitive.

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Identifying natural allies was a critical and challenging first step. Between a Republican governor and a resistant, part-time board of aldermen, Craig found herself in a difficult policy environment.ⁱⁱ While both the governor and the aldermen recognized there was a crisis, reaching an agreement on solutions was nearly impossible. Navigating this political situation would be the test of her mayoralty, and her political legacy would be defined by how she moved the needle on these two seemingly intractable public policy crises.

Mayor Joyce Craig

Craig beat her Republican predecessor in 2017 and was the first woman to represent the Queen City in its 173-year history. She had begun her career in public service as a member of the Manchester School Board, so it was perhaps no surprise that her City Hall office, overlooking the Merrimack River, had a basket of children's books to entertain young visitors and was covered in drawings from local elementary school students who were frequent guests. After two years on the School Board, Craig was elected to the board of aldermen in 2009. She first ran for mayor in 2015, losing to incumbent Republican Ted Gatsas by a mere sixty-four votes. Craig won her mayoral bid on her second campaign, defeating Gatsas in 2017 by a wide margin—1,500 votes out of nearly 23,000 cast.^{8,9}

The fact that Manchester was seeing an overdose death almost every three days was a central focus of Craig's 2017 campaign from the outset. In one debate, she described the opioid epidemic as affecting "our friends and family," and cast the battle against chronic homelessness as a moral challenge.¹⁰ Craig ended her 2017 victory speech promising "real and lasting progress against the opioid crisis."¹¹

Mayor-elect Craig guaranteed day-one progress on the opioid epidemic, committing to marshal new resources and establish a collective style of city governance. Public Health Director Anna Thomas, reflecting on her twenty-five years serving Manchester mayors, described Craig's style as "really proactive. Mayor Craig wants to be at the table in community meetings. She likes to see planning processes that are well thought-out, collaborative, and inclusive."¹² This style proved invaluable in recruiting the support of apolitical public servants in the City. One such employee, Manchester Fire Department Chief Dan Goonan, said, "Mayor Craig is someone who is compassionate to people on the ground doing the work . . . she took a lot of interest in our work and really helped us out."¹³

Regardless of how supportive Manchester public servants were, no serious progress could happen without buy-in from the mayor's board of aldermen. Craig's relationship with her aldermen was sometimes contentious. Issuing bold policy proposals to a board of fourteen part-time legislators—many of them small business owners interested in maintaining Manchester's strict tax cap—had led to more than a few confrontations. Some observers speculated this may have been due to the increasingly partisan nature of these debates, with one resident positing, "This argument is all politics. It's Republicans against a Democratic mayor. Everything else is noise."¹⁴

ⁱⁱ Putnam (1988) writes about "two-level games," a concept which might be helpful in this context. In this model, negotiations take place at two levels. Level I is a higher-level negotiation where larger deals are agreed upon. Level II negotiations happen locally, while level I deals are ratified and implemented.

Inside Manchester, New Hampshire

Home to an estimated 111,000 individuals in 2019, Manchester was located at the northern end of the Boston metro area, about an hour from downtown Boston in minimal traffic. The City's reputation as a vibrant, increasingly young urban core with a high standard of living was at odds with the stark presence of drug use, panhandling, and homelessness.

Politically, New Hampshire had long been known as the consummate swing state whose residents delighted in early primaries and intense local politics. Some Granite State locals chalked this up to the state's founding. Patrick Tufts, President and CEO of Granite United Way and member of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, explained, "The way our state was set up during the American Revolution makes change hard; it's an anti-consolidatory state with a strong opposition to power, very weak government, and brief tenure."¹⁵

As the county seat and largest city of New Hampshire's most populous county, Manchester was a frequent stop for candidates during the 2016 Presidential Election, and the opioid epidemic was often a major topic of discussion. It was in Manchester that then-presidential candidate Donald Trump announced his focus on combating opioid sales and misuse, proclaiming, "If we don't get tough on drug dealers, we are wasting our time, and that toughness includes the death penalty."¹⁶ His controversial statements—which put him at odds with both Craig and the state's Republican Governor, Chris Sununu—were not the first time Trump had used Manchester and New Hampshire to make a point. A few months prior to this visit, he was rebuked when transcripts of a call between him and Mexican President Peña Nieto revealed his reference to the state as "a drug-infested den."¹⁷

These issues touched on a famous third rail of New Hampshire politics: taxation. The *Live Free or Die* state was one of only two in the nation without sales or income or taxes. The state's overall tax burden was forty-sixth in the country in 2018, leaving municipalities, like Manchester, ill-equipped to tackle large-scale public policy solutions without significant state or community investment.¹⁸ The situation was so dire that activists had recently attempted to sue the state for failing to adequately fund city- and county-wide efforts to pay for services.¹⁹ Professor Marsch, an expert on drug policy, also noted the extremely low amount of state funding available for long-term, in-house treatment, and affordable transitional housing.

The opioid epidemic in New Hampshire was urgent enough to pave the way for serious political concessions from Republican lawmakers. Governor Sununu signed a needle exchange bill into law in 2017 (making New Hampshire the last state in New England to offer this service), and then-Mayor Ted Gatsas created Manchester's Safe Station program. Stewarded by state Republicans, Safe Stations turned every fire station into a stigma-free, 24/7 resource center for those suffering from opioid use disorder (OUD). After gaining major support from the Manchester advocacy community, Safe Stations began in 2016 with national fanfare, and program founder and EMS Officer Chris Hickey winning a 2017 National Pillar of Excellence Award for his work.²⁰ However, early studies suggested that while all involved partners (including the Manchester Fire Department, responding EMTs, and staff at the local treatment facility, Serenity Place) were highly receptive of the program, impact was limited and wait times were long.²¹

State Action and Inaction

Beginning in 2019, the Sununu Administration began stewarding a new OUD treatment model based on Vermont's successful use of federal funds to serve more rural populations through a "hub-and-spoke" system. It was named the "Doorways" program and was funded with a \$45 million grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). This model divided New Hampshire into nine regions of service and provided each with funds to support local efforts to confront the opioid epidemic. (See Appendix 2 for an outline of the regions and the model.)

When the state won the SAMHSA grant, Governor Sununu delivered a speech outlining the nine-region model, announcing proudly, "The location of each of the nine Doorways will ensure that help for substance use disorder will be less than an hour away."²² Despite his enthusiasm, Sununu never publicly endorsed increased state funding or indicated that he was willing to give up state control of the funds.

In July 2019, the New Hampshire legislature passed an annual budget along partisan lines that would have increased funding on opioid treatment. But the governor vetoed it, citing high costs and the possibility of turning businesses away from the state.²³ This veto attracted a deluge of criticism from state senators, with one Democrat saying Sununu was "putting politics ahead of the people" and calling him "reckless, tone-deaf, and Trumpian."²⁴ One anonymous politician familiar with the governor summed up Sununu's negotiation style as simply "unpredictable."²⁵ Given Sununu's inconsistent support for Manchester's OUD and homelessness services, engaging city officials, local non-profit leaders, and community members would be critical to advancing Craig's priorities.

New Allies in the Fight

During her last Christmas prior to taking office, Mayor-elect Craig was celebrating with her family when she received an urgent phone call. Putting the festivities on pause, she picked up and Chief Dan Goonan delivered the bad news on the other end: Serenity Place, Manchester's largest treatment center for addiction and sole provider for individuals utilizing Safe Station, had closed overnight due to financial mismanagement and unsustainable demand. Knowing she had to react quickly, Craig convened regional experts to help pull Safe Stations out from a nosedive. State representatives, local service providers, private donors, and other supporters all answered her call to save the program over the new year.

Critical to saving the program was Maureen Beauregard, President and co-founder of Families in Transition-New Horizons, a Manchester-based nonprofit dedicated to supporting homeless families and individuals—and the designated trustee for Serenity Place. Reflecting on the work done prior to her inauguration, Craig said, "I'd rather have too many voices around the table than too few . . . if this program had fallen apart, the state would have had a crisis."²⁶

The outcome of this emergency convening was Safe Stations 2.0, a reboot of the faltering program that paired the firehouses with multiple service providers in order to streamline and tailor interventions to each individual. One such partner was Lyft, which provided free transportation to and from the firehouses. (See Appendix 3.) In Craig's first month in office, these new partnerships and interventions

shortened the time it took for OUD victims using Safe Stations services to be admitted to long-term recovery services from weeks to days.²⁷

Once triage methods such as Safe Stations were reformed, moving people into housing for recovery was a crucial next step. The connection between opioid use disorder and homelessness was so clear in the official response to the opioid epidemic presented to the state that the City concluded with, "In 2017 alone, the Manchester Safe Stations program welcomed 1,241 unique participants who came seeking help with substance use disorder. Of those, the vast majority were not stably housed. Though housing insecurity and substance use disorder do not always go hand in hand, the immense success of the Safe Stations program has demonstrated the profound need for increased housing support for those seeking help with substance use disorder."²⁸

Craig, however, was not the first mayor to attempt to end homelessness in Manchester; in fact, the City had a long history of half-measures and dead ends. In 2008, then-Mayor Frank Guinta issued a comprehensive anti-homelessness plan titled "A Home for Everyone," with moderate success. Lauren Smith, Craig's director of communications and policy, noted the fleeting nature of the 2008 homelessness plan: "When the administration turned over, there was no political will to continue the work."²⁹ As Craig considered how she would tackle chronic homelessness during her own mayoral tenure, she hoped to build the political will that had been missing ten years earlier.

Craig's first conversation around this new effort was an awkward one. Though she barely knew him, Craig reached out to Patrick Tufts, President and CEO of Granite United Way, to lead the effort. One strategy they both agreed on was forming another Task Force on Homelessness. (See Appendix 4 for a list of task force members and their organization.) A key early objective of this task force was to create sustained, positive engagement from vocal members of the community, particularly those that usually opposed transformational efforts. One such party was Manchester's business community, which regularly complained about panhandlers at aldermen meetings but had little interest in expanding city services.

Enlisting support from the business community became priority number one for Tufts, who reflected on these early calls, saying, "you have to bring in a broad-based group of stakeholders; this touches on more perspectives than just service providers. You need disagreement and contention around the table. Finding negative voices was critical." Convincing these core merchant groups to address homelessness without criminalization was a huge step for the task force in guaranteeing legitimacy and buy-in. Tufts, a long-time pillar of the community, felt that his history of bipartisan efforts and earnest support for the City's service providers was integral in getting sign-in from more recalcitrant members of the Manchester community.³⁰

Next, Tufts wanted to build on this progress and bring some aldermen on board, especially those with different perspectives on homelessness. "With evidence and dialogue, we can change their minds and help them become part of the solution" became a sort of mantra for Tufts and informed who was invited to these conversations. Smith reported that since this model of engagement began, "We have seen sustained interest in focusing on solving systemic causes of homelessness [and] we've seen a decrease in complaints on panhandling."³¹

The task force's first recommendations focused on panhandling, a subject that attracted widespread attention and misunderstandings. Beauregard, a passionate advocate for the City's homeless, supported the panhandling ban and believed that officially discouraging this practice was a matter of life and death for individuals begging for money and food. She grew emotional as she reflected on a tent she had seen erected near a highway bridge during one New Hampshire winter. She noticed the tent's deteriorated condition, and later learned that a man had tragically died there. She wondered how he had survived out there at all, and if his death was connected to the precarious support that individuals provided to panhandlers, compared to the more stable services provided by an organization like Families in Transition-New Horizons. Beauregard explained that "providing people with food is dangerous, and I still think about that man. That's what people need to know."³² After tackling the panhandling issue, the task force focused its recommendations on improving service provision and providing stable housing.³³

"When Mayor Craig calls people to a table, they come. They listen," said Smith as she reflected on the process of building this diverse group of stakeholders.³⁴ Having convinced this group of skeptical influencers in the City, with the help of seasoned veterans in the community, Craig now had ample momentum for local support. These skills would soon be put to the test as she began to enlist her aldermen for support.

No Way Forward Alone

While the Doorways program aimed to provide every Granite State resident access to local, comprehensive, in-house treatment, Manchester was still seen by neighboring communities as the state's treatment option of choice for tough cases of service provision. In 2019 alone, Safe Stations saw a 30 percent year-over-year increase in visits, with over 61 percent of these visits coming from individuals who did not live in Manchester.³⁵ The aldermen did not shy away from expressing their disappointment and frustration at the disproportionate role that Manchester played in the care of New Hampshire residents seeking addiction treatment.

The issue came to a head again during a tense alderman meeting on March 5, 2019. The meeting began with heated public dialogue over addressing the homelessness crisis. After an hour of public comments, Ward 3 Alderman Tim Baines, an Independent, introduced an ordinance to give business owners full autonomy of their sidewalk space, with the express intent of allowing them to remove sleeping or panhandling homeless individuals near their stores. The ordinance passed 12-0.

Craig, after a strained moment of silence, lowered her glasses and, with a shrug, vetoed the legislation, noting the City's response to homelessness "requires a collective, compassionate and systematic approach, and the issue of homelessness cannot be looked at in isolation." She further justified her bold veto by reminding the aldermen that this ordinance posed a threat of litigation by entities like the ACLU against the cash-strapped city, a tactic that appeared particularly persuasive to aldermen who had originally supported the measure.³⁶ Immediately, the aldermen snapped back, with Alderman Keith Herschman accusing Craig of endangering lives, and Alderman Joe Kelly Levasseur asking rhetorically, "How does a mayor veto something that passes with 12 votes?"³⁷ After several minutes of intense back and forth, the board voted again, failing to override the veto, with Mayor Craig convincing a majority of the aldermen to vote against their unanimous measure, 5-6-1. One alderman, who

ultimately abstained after a long moment of consideration, ended his vote by turning off his mic and quietly mumbling, "We are all trying to do the right thing."³⁸

Meanwhile, many aldermen, particularly those representing business corridors, believed that programs that gently and slowly housed the homeless and treated those suffering from addiction were an insult to taxpayers and job creators. Historical decisions by the board in the past had favored expeditious solutions that criminalized behavior, rather than incremental, recuperative change.³⁹ In March of 2019, Alderman Joe Kelly Levasseur announced his intention to end the Safe Stations program, noting that neighboring communities like Nashua relied on it unfairly and used Manchester as "the dumping ground for so many of the social ills that are going on around the state."⁴⁰ Mayor Craig responded immediately, enlisting Chief Goonan, who rebuked Alderman Levasseur. "As long as I'm here, this program's going to go on," Goonan said.⁴¹ The March 19th board meeting that followed attracted a wide array of community supporters who vocally supported the program and its role in the Greater Manchester community. The board gave a vote of confidence to the Safe Station program; even Alderman Levasseur ultimately cast a vote supporting it.⁴²

Together as One?

Craig knew she was in a risky and partisan negotiation to improve service options in Manchester, but there was hope. She had several noteworthy accomplishments that bought her leverage over both higher-level actors, such as Governor Sununu, and local parties, such as her aldermen. Her proven ability to design and implement policy changes, such as salvaging Safe Stations, had built a national profile while her ability to convene and coalesce diverse stakeholders around intractable issues meant she had momentum moving forward.

A two-pronged path had emerged. Within the City, she had a vast dataset of every fatal overdose logged in 2019 when the deaths began to increase. Every state had been asked by SAMHSA to convene an Overdose Fatality Review Committee to examine the circumstances of each overdose. Under executive order by Governor Maggie Hassan in 2016, New Hampshire initiated a committee, but after a couple of initial meetings, it failed to convene again. Craig, along with Director Thomas, had been pressing Governor Sununu to reinstate the committee. Said Craig, "We don't know what we don't know. This committee can take a deep dive into the circumstance of each overdose death and try to determine what the socioeconomic factors were, with the ultimate goal of preventing more overdose fatalities from occurring." Thomas added, "We should never be speculating. We have had enough deaths now, unfortunately, that we can dissect their path to addiction and cause of death. We owe it to them to honor their loss of life in order to prevent future tragedy."

Simultaneously, Craig scaled up her outreach to state legislators in New Hampshire. Beginning with their inclusion on the Homelessness Task Force, she made efforts to attract more state-level attention to Manchester's position. A major effort was underway to open twenty-four new "respite beds" at New Horizons.

Instead of immediately returning individuals to the streets or temporary shelter, these facilities could provide a safe place for those transitioning from inpatient care to long-term recovery and were thus considered an essential resource in bridging housing and addiction therapy.⁴³ Although the beds had

already been constructed and were ready to receive clients, they required state funds for operation—funds in limbo due to Governor Sununu's budget veto.

Although it was only one element of the City's response to the opioid and homelessness crises, the opening and operation of these beds hinged on a successful budget negotiation. Craig had sought to gain more statewide and influential buy-in from state senators who possessed more direct leverage over the governor. But barriers remained. Craig did not know how these negotiations and conversations would ultimately conclude, but she was hopeful for the City: "It's so important that Manchester is not known as the epicenter of the opioid or homelessness epidemic . . . we've made progress and we've got momentum."

Appendices

Appendix 1 Timeline of Select Events

November 8, 2017: Alderman Joyce Craig is elected Mayor of Manchester, NH, beating the incumbent Mayor Ted Gatsas by 1,500 votes.

December 4, 2017: The ACLU successfully sues Manchester, receiving \$89,000 in a settlement for discriminating against homeless individuals with ordinances restricting panhandling.

December 21, 2017: Serenity Place, a key service provider in Manchester, closes down after running a \$500,000 deficit, citing overburdened staff and a failure to adequately bill for Medicaid-eligible services. Families in Transition promises to take on their caseload.

January 2, 2018: Craig assumes office as the 56th Mayor of Manchester and the City's first female mayor.

February 4, 2018: Safe Stations 2.0 is piloted and is widely cited as a vast improvement on the original model.

March 19, 2018: President Trump visits the Granite State, touting his administration's progress in combatting the opioid epidemic and doubling down on his threat to pursue the death penalty for drug traffickers in the state.

September 19, 2018: New Hampshire is awarded a \$45 million grant for statewide opioid response measures from SAMHSA.

December 28, 2018: Governor Sununu announces a new model for responding to the opioid epidemic based on Vermont's hub-and-spoke model, called the Doorways program.

February 13, 2019: Craig announces a Task Force on Homelessness to be made up of leaders from faith groups, non-profits, and local businesses during her State of the City address.

March 19, 2019: At-large Alderman Joe Kelly Levasseur proposes legislation that would end Safe Stations, citing heavy out-of-town burdens inflicted by neighboring communities. Numerous public officials defend the program, and the measure is defeated.

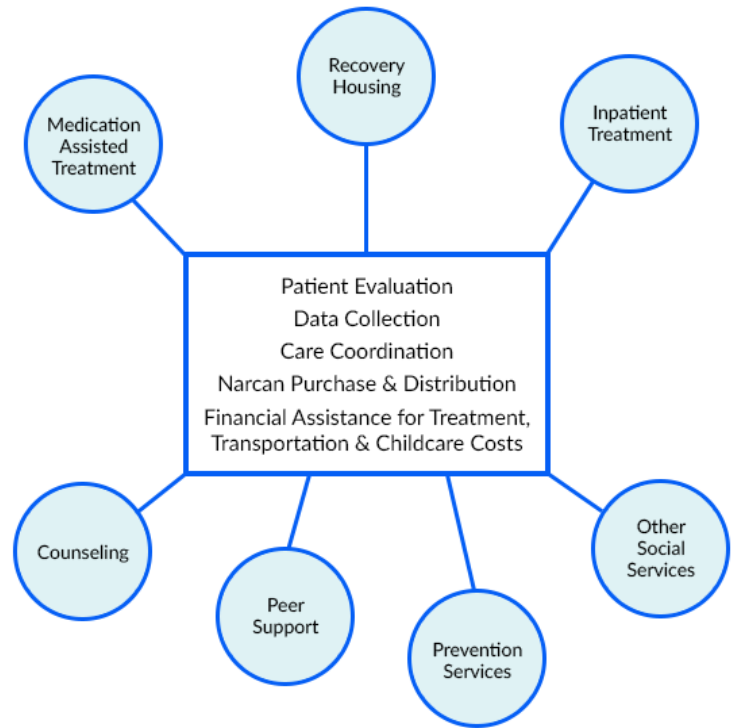
April 16, 2019: Task Force on Homelessness announces key findings and recommendations, including hiring staff to coordinate between different service providers and agencies, and noting the challenge that the opioid epidemic posed to providing care.

April 29, 2019: Analysis of Manchester's opioid response indicates that key programs within the City are disproportionately utilized by out-of-city residents, with some Manchester officials decrying other communities using the City as a "dumping ground."

May 3, 2019: New data indicates that overdose deaths continue to rise in Manchester, even as total overdose numbers decrease.

July 3, 2019: Governor Sununu vetoes the New Hampshire state budget, citing high costs with new money going towards combating the opioid epidemic, among other increases.

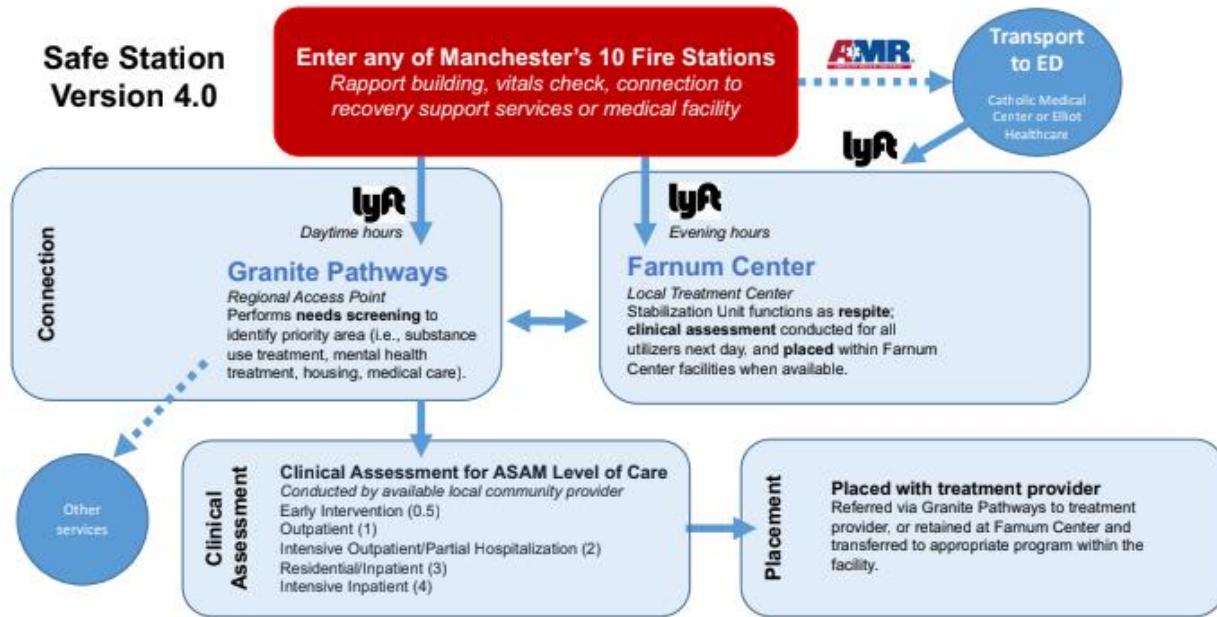
Appendix 2 "Doorways" Regions and Model



Source: Sara Plourde, 'Many Questions Remain as Officials Hustle to Launch New Addiction Care System,' *New Hampshire Public Radio*, December 12, 2018, <https://www.nhpr.org/post/many-questions-remain-officials-hustle-launch-new-addiction-care-system#stream/0>

Appendix 3 Safe Stations Flowchart

Since Safe Stations 2.0 was piloted in February 2018, Manchester continued to iterate and further improve the program. This flowchart shows the sequence of services for Safe Stations 4.0.



Source: SAFE STATION: A Systematic Evaluation of a Novel Community-based Model to Tackle the Opioid Crisis. *Center for Technology and Behavioral Health*. September 2018.

Appendix 4 Homelessness Task Force Composition

Name	Affiliation
Arthur Sullivan	Brady Sullivan Properties
Jon Sparkman	Devine Millimet
Kim Roy	Doubletree Manchester
Sarah Beaudry	In Town Manchester
Ed Aloise	Republic Café & Campo Enoteca
Sean Owen (Capacity Subcommittee Chair)	WedÜ
Kent Devereaux	New Hampshire Institute of Art
Mike Decile	University of New Hampshire - Manchester
Alderman Bill Barry	City of Manchester
Alderman Tim Baines	City of Manchester
Leon LaFreniere	City of Manchester
Mayor Joyce Craig (Task Force Co-Chair)	City of Manchester
Chief Dan Goonan	City of Manchester Fire Department
Anna Thomas (Prevention Subcommittee Chair)	City of Manchester Health Department
Chief Carl Capano	City of Manchester Police Department
Charlene Michaud	City of Manchester Welfare Department
Emily Rice	Manchester City Solicitor
Kris McCracken	Manchester Community Health Center
Denise VanZanten	Manchester Library
Jocelyne Pinsonneault	Manchester School District
Dean Christon	New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority
Pat Long	New Hampshire State House of Representatives
Henry Klementowicz	American Civil Liberties Union
Mike Skelton (Panhandling Subcommittee Chair)	Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce
Chrissy Simonds	Homeless Advocate
Bill Rider	The Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester
Borja Alvarez de Toledo	Waypoint
Erin Kelly (Services Subcommittee Chair)	Waypoint
Tim Soucy	Catholic Medical Center
Cathy Kuhn	Families in Transition-New Horizons
Maureen Beauregard	Families in Transition-New Horizons
Patrick Tufts (Task Force Co-Chair)	Granite United Way
Mary Sliney	The Way Home
Craig Chevalier	1269 Café
Mary Chevalier	1269 Café
Tom Blonski	Catholic Charities New Hampshire
Pastor John Rivera	Hope Tabernacle Church

Source: City of Manchester, “Homelessness Taskforce Summary” (City of Manchester, 2019), https://www.manchesternh.gov/Portals/2/Departments/elected_officials/mayor/press_room/Homelessness%20Task%20Force%20Summary.pdf?ver=2019-04-17-093957-147

KEY			
	Business	Academia	Government
	Advocacy	Nonprofit	Faith-Based

Endnotes

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- ¹³ Fire Department Chief Dan Goonan, interview by case authors, July 23, 2019.
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