



NEWS RELEASE

Office of the Supervisor Town of Niskayuna

One Niskayuna Circle
Niskayuna, NY 12309
518-386-4548

For Further Information Contact

Jessica Brennan
518-542-3354

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Town of Niskayuna connects residents with mental health and social services— weeks-old initiative aims to improve mental health access and reduce disparities.

NISKAYUNA, NY Beginning on August 1st, Niskayuna residents in need social services have been able find help through a new program, **Nisky Connects**. The town initiative connects residents with a referral network of over 580 organizations across 22 counties in New York State coordinated by Healthy Alliance in Troy. People with mental health and social needs— such as food and housing, utilities assistance, transportation, legal, and benefits navigation – are connected to local organizations that are ready and willing to help. **Nisky Connects** is free to residents and Town employees, and comes at zero cost to the Town.

[Healthy Alliance](#) recognizes Niskayuna as the first municipality in the state to offer the referral platform. Niskayuna Town Supervisor Jaime Puccioni is proud of the partnership. “We have a great team here in Town Hall ready to connect people in need with the Healthy Alliance referral platform,” she said. “I have seen how this tool looks at problems in the broader context and offers assistance to meet many needs.” Puccioni continued, “I am thankful that Deputy Supervisor Jessica Brennan championed this project and brought us this important platform.”

Brennan explained, “I made a pledge to our community to improve mental health access for Niskayuna residents and Town employees. This mission became more imperative given the continued impacts of the pandemic, and the rise of gun violence in our country.”

Brennan spearheaded the initiative for the town after she first learned about the Healthy Alliance referral platform in her role as a school district social worker. The Niskayuna Central School District will be utilizing the same referral platform this fall for students and their families. **Nisky Connects** began accepting members on August 1, and so far, has been successful in broadening the access to serve all residents and Town employees.

The referral platform is HIPPA compliant and can help support the needs of the whole person in the context of their environment by using a screening tool. For example, an individual contacts **Nisky Connects** seeking housing assistance for an elderly parent. A subsequent conversation reveals the parent’s additional needs for food, socialization, and health care coordination. Brennan explains, “the hope is to reduce health disparities, and provide care for all.”

Niskayuna Police Officers have been training to utilize the platform for residents at home, in the community or at the station. Chief Jordan Kochan states, “Our department engages with our residents and our community daily. Having better access to resources only enhances our ability to provide the best service possible. Many times, we don’t have a direct contact

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or access point for a particular resource. This platform is giving us the ability to expeditiously assist with that direct contact, and to better support the needs of our community."

Residents can access **Nisky Connects** by contacting program coordinator Dottie Gillen in person, at the Niskayuna Town Hall, Monday through Friday 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM, except on the first and third Tuesday of each month when she directly supports residents at the Town Senior Center mornings from 9:00AM until 11:00 AM. Individuals can also call Gillen's direct phone line (518) 386-4527 and complete a referral over the phone. According to program administrators, residents can expect to be contacted by an organization that can help within three days.

"We've already had a dozen residents successfully sign-up." says Gillen. "It's exciting and rewarding to have a new way to help people. For example, I have residents come in who have lost loved ones and need support. Healthy Alliance's referral platform is the kind of tool that will really make a difference in these circumstances."

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