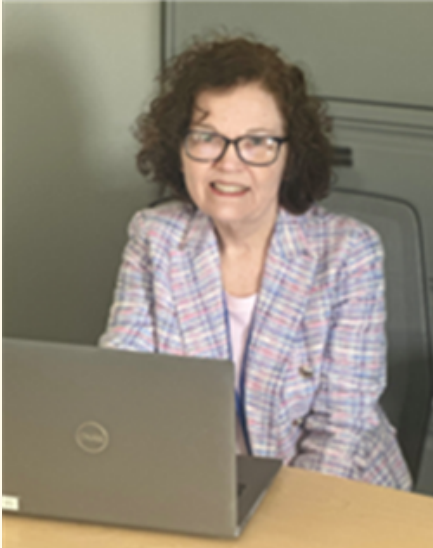


# Employee

## Spotlight



## Bette McHugh

For most people, the workday falls along familiar lines — 8 to 4, or 9 to 5, or something like that.

Not so for Bette McHugh.

After a busy day at the office, Bette might sit and relax or unwind while she finishes a crossword puzzle. But many evenings, her

downtime is followed by a new round of productivity. She might plow through more draft regulations, or read newly introduced General Assembly bills, or just do something that will have her better prepared when she's back in the office.

The nighttime toil is no big deal, she says — not when many of her colleagues also take work home. Fair enough. But Bette also thinks nothing of coming in on Saturdays. Or Sundays. Or sometimes both. As her co-workers know, this is what you get with Bette — all-out, 100 percent, all the time.

“Bette McHugh is one of those people who just speaks dedication,” said Tom Martin, Director of BHDDH’s Division of Behavioral Health. “She’s passionate about the work, she goes above and beyond, and she does that because she wants to have a positive impact on people’s lives.”

By all appearances, Bette’s career at the agency now known as the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals was meant to be. She recalls that just a couple of weeks after arriving, she was sent to a conference at the New England School of Addiction and Prevention Studies. What the field needs, said one speaker, is not “summer warriors” who are there when the going is good, but people who are “in it for the long haul.”

Bette attended that conference in 1988. The words have been with her ever since. They were there as she oversaw the state’s network of regional prevention coalitions; they were there as she oversaw programs that put student assistance counselors in middle, junior high, and high schools; they were there when the department’s prevention staff was, for a time, cut down to one person: Bette.

Though she can’t put a number on how many roles she’s held over the years, she has no trouble pointing to outcomes and accomplishments that have been especially rewarding.

One is the work of the regional prevention coalitions, created by the General Assembly in 1987 at the behest of then-state Rep. Russell Bramley, who said having local people involved would help the cause of prevention. She has been staunch supporter of the coalitions, even when others thought they were not worth the trouble.

# Bette McHugh

## Spotlight (cont'd)

Another is the *Hispanics Prevention and Education* program, because it brought in tutors and embedded workers in classrooms in Providence and Central Falls, helping students who were learning to speak English. It also offered after-school programs, cultural enrichment opportunities and summer work opportunities.

“We had doctors and lawyers come in, and business owners, and they would say, ‘look what I’ve accomplished’” she said. “One of the kids that went through that program is now at a high level in another state agency, and he has told people that it is because of the program that he is where he is.”

She also points to the *Youth Access to Tobacco Law*, which banned sales of tobacco products to minors. It finally passed in 1996, with strong support from the prevention coalitions, schools, police departments, and advocacy groups, among others. It was, she says, an example of what can be accomplished “when people work together.”

Despite her passion, Bette says she did not set out to work in prevention. Her goal was to teach public health law at the University of Toronto, and she started graduate work there after earning a Bachelor of Arts in English at Providence College. But family concerns changed her plans, and that led to her first full-time job, in vital records, at the Rhode Island Department of Health.

She then moved to prevention work at what is now BHDDH, taking on whatever roles would help the cause. From there, the state’s prevention work moved, with Bette, to the Governor’s Office, and then to the Department of Health, and finally back to BHDDH. Through all the moves and evolving roles, she figures she’s changed offices at least 20 times. The moves were so frequent at one point that a correctional officer who helped with them pointed to his watch one day and joked, “It’s been a couple of weeks, time to move ya.”

She’s been in her current office, in Simpson Hall, for about five years, which might be a record. More important to Bette is who she has worked with.

“I’ve been really lucky to have worked with some really fine people, who care and really want to help the people that we serve,” she said. “Not everyone can say that.”

Though her primary focus now is legislation and regulations – work she is more than comfortable with given her interest in law – she is sometimes asked to lend her expertise in other areas. Just last month, she was asked along with five others to be part of a department-wide Planning Task Force that will develop “operational and tactical plans” to help BHDDH achieve its strategic goals.

She foresees little added impact on her after-hours work schedule.

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