

Hillside Children's Center is laying off 244 workers

Hillside Children's Center, based in Rochester, is closing a facility in Seneca County, state records show. PROVIDED

State records show facility in Seneca

County set to close

David Robinson

Albany Bureau USA TODAY NETWORK

Hillside Children's Center is closing its Romulus residential treatment facility and laying off 244 workers, state records show.

The nonprofit that provides services to children and their families with a range of emotional and behavioral challenges disclosed the Varick Residential Treatment Campus closing in Seneca County will be finished in early September.

The campus serves 79 youths from across New York state and efforts are underway to move them to other residential facilities and programs without disrupting their care, according to a statement the nonprofit provided to USA TODAY Network in New York.

About 60 workers losing jobs in Romulus will be relocated to other Hillside campuses along with the youths, the nonprofit said. Hillside officials noted other workers at the site will be offered help to pursue new jobs internally or with other employers in the region.



Why is it closing?

Hillside attributed the Romulus facility closing in part to industrywide shifts away from residential care toward community-based services, as well as costprohibitive improvements that would have been needed to keep the Varick campus open.

“Over the last 14 years, we have created specialty residential treatment programs on the Varick campus that have advanced our field and improved outcomes for countless youth and families,” said Maria Cristalli, president and CEO of Hillside Family of Agencies, the nonprofit's parent organization.

“That work will continue on other Hillside campuses, where staff and youth can work in a safer and more updated environment.”

Other reasons for the closing included struggles to recruit and retain direct-care staff at the campus on the site of the former Seneca Army Depot, which Hillside has operated under a lease agreement since 2004, the nonprofit said.

What about its other facilities?

Despite the statements about trends reducing the need for residential care where youths receive round-the-clock intensive treatment, Hillside suggested its other residential sites statewide were stable.

One reason is the Varick campus was the only one operated under a lease. The others in Rochester and Chili in Monroe County, Auburn in Cayuga County, Bath in Steuben County and Greene in Chenango County are all owned by the nonprofit and have sufficient capacity to meet future demand for residential services, Hillside stated.

The Rochester-based Hillside nonprofit had revenue totaling about \$126 million in 2017, up from \$121 million the prior year, according to its most recent federal tax filings.

It had about 2,200 employees during the 2017 fiscal year, the records show.

It is part of the Hillside Family of Agencies, which provides child welfare, mental and physical health, youth development, juvenile justice, special education and developmental disabilities services across central and western New York, according to its website.

Hillside Family of Agencies also serves Washington, D.C., and Prince George's County, Maryland. The overall organization served about 14,000 youth and families in 2018.

The Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies, which advocates for programs for youths, said it was not too concerned about the closure.

“While there will always be some youth who need high-quality residential treatment services, there are now more options for meeting the needs of some of those youth,” said James Purcell, CEO of the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies.

Hillside's statements about the Romulus facility closure put the total number of layoffs at 235 full- and part-time workers.

It did not immediately answer questions about the discrepancies between its tally and the one disclosed through the state Labor Department this week, which reflected 244 employees being cut.