

Family Support Centers reopen

Counseling program for youths operating again in 2 Ontario County school districts

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A counseling program for youths and their families that had been discontinued in 2009 because of a lack of funding has been restored at two Ontario County school districts.

Family Support Centers have been reopened in the Canandaigua and Phelps-Clifton Springs Central School Districts.

"Most of our referrals right now are coming in from the individual schools whose counselors or teachers are aware of families that are struggling and know this is a free service that's available to their district residents," said Lynne Gochenaur, coordinator of the centers.

They help families deal with issues such as aggression, temper tantrums, social anxiety, and issues with peers in school.

"We've had families who are dealing with children who are either bullying themselves, or are being bullied," Gochenaur said.

The existing resources now available are "extremely limited," she said.

Many families have financial and transportation limitations because of the rural setting of Ontario County. And some have had negative experiences with other service providers. The public agencies and private practitioners often have long waiting lists, Gochenaur said.

Using those services also often requires insurance and clients sometimes can't afford copayments.

"There are so many barriers that really prevent people from getting these kinds of services and that's what makes this program so unique and so incredibly necessary," Gochenaur said.

The Centers, which opened Feb. 1, have the capacity for 12 appointment slots weekly. Each location offers appointments twice each week, with three openings at each site each day. The Centers originally started in the Phelps-Clifton Springs Central School District in 2001 and eventually grew to three other districts in Ontario and Yates counties: Marcus-Whitman, Canandaigua and Manchester-Shortsville.

By 2009 state funding for the programs was cut off and they closed, although the Canandaigua site was able to stay open for a short time with district funding.

Now the Partnership for Ontario County, a nonprofit community service agency, acquired about \$70,000 in state funding, which is enough to stay open one year. The Partnership is seeking additional funding to stay open longer and to possibly add other districts.

"We're open now and we have funds to maintain the program through next year at this time, but we are constantly looking for additional funding sources to sustain the program," she said.

The Centers use furnished space in the participating school district that was created when the program was first established. Most of the professionals who work in the Support Centers also are district employees, such as counselors and psychologists.

Gochenaur, who lives in Canandaigua, worked for 29 years as the student assistance coordinator in the Marcus Whitman School District before retiring from that job. She still also works as a national consultant.

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Lynne Gochenaur

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