

Mental health clinic to stay open with new operator

Monroe Youth and Family Center was in danger of closing

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A Syracuse-based human services agency will take over and expand programs at a Rochester mental health clinic for children and young adults that was at risk of shutting down this summer. Monroe County officials had been trying to find a new operator for the facility and said its closure could have further stressed the region's already-strained outpatient mental health system. Liberty Resources Inc. of Syracuse said Monday it reached agreements with state and county mental health officials to assume operations of the Monroe Youth and Family Center at 175 Humboldt St., hopefully sometime in July. The clinic is now run by Auburn-based Cayuga Centers.

Both agencies are private organizations, but in order to run the center, they must be licensed by the state and enter a contract with the county. Carl M. Coyle, Liberty Resources' chief executive officer, said some staff at the facility already were laid off or have left. That has prompted some 250 families of patients at the clinic to try to find services elsewhere, but most only have been able to get on waiting lists with other providers, he said.

"It's just deteriorating so quickly that families are being left out there in the lurch," he said. "We want to get services back online."

As of last week, about 260 people still were receiving services through the center, according to Coyle. At its peak, the center served about 700 children and families. Liberty Resources is alerting organizations that refer children or young adults for outpatient mental health services — including hospitals and probation and social service officials — that it will start admitting patients again soon, Coyle said. The agency also plans to expand and serve adults at the facility, taking on roughly 1,200 patients overall at any given time and up to 2,000 annually. The expanded office also will get a new name: Liberty Resources Behavioral Health Clinic, Coyle said. An official with Cayuga Centers confirmed that it will cease operating the facility, but said it is proud of the work it has done there.

"The agency will continue providing the services that it has in Monroe County and throughout the rest of the state," said Alice Berry, Cayuga Centers' vice president for Monroe County-based programs.

After Cayuga Centers notified the county of its plans, officials put out word that the facility needed a new provider, said David Putney, director of the county Office of Mental Health.

Cayuga Centers faced the same challenges that many other outpatient mental health service providers do — high demand for services and low reimbursements from health insurers, he said.

"Cayuga had operated that service for many months and did so in a quality way," Putney said. "They were not able to meet the fiscal demands for successful financial operations."

Those challenges will remain with any provider, but Putney said Liberty Resources has turned around similar programs elsewhere.

"We're thrilled that it's moving forward and we're extra thrilled that Liberty has an established history of operating these services successfully," he said.

The addition of mental health services for adults could help begin to meet a major need in the county. The waiting time to access adult treatment ranges from weeks to two or three months, according to Putney.

These long waits point to broader, nationwide problems with mental health treatment, Coyle said.

"Every community is like this," he said. "There's just not enough access to mental health services."

Liberty Resources said it operates throughout New York and Texas and has more than 2,500 clients in Onondaga, Madison and Oswego counties. A subsidiary, Liberty POST, already runs an early intervention program for children on Winton Road.

Liberty still needs to wrap up "final paperwork" with the state and county, but "in principle, all the essentials are in place," Putney said.

For referrals or to seek treatment through Liberty Resources, call (585) 410-3370.

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