



Mental health crisis center construction — 'It's long overdue'



11 HOURS AGO • BY AL KNAUBER INDEPENDENT RECORD

Ceremonial shovels, with gold-painted blades, marked the start of construction on a facility to serve people undergoing mental health crises.

Lewis and Clark County officials joined with an array of mental health service providers and advocates on Tuesday for the groundbreaking at the Jackson Street site of the Center for Mental Health.

"It's long overdue to have a facility with beds to help people in crises," Sydney Blair, CEO of the Center for Mental Health, said.

"It's going to be a great place for us to feel good about bringing our family members," she continued.

Those who seek mental health assistance at the new facility won't suffer from the stigma that accompanies those who go to the state hospital for mental health services, Blair added.

Golden Eagle Construction of Helena will have 300 days once all of the paperwork is finished to complete construction, said Kyle Thomas, the county's assistant director of public works.

While construction is projected for completion by the end of August or early September, the facility should be open by mid-October, Thomas said.

The \$1.2 million project represents a partnership much like how it will be managed, county Commissioner Andy Hunthausen said.

The Montana Mental Health Trust is providing \$300,000 toward the project and the Center for Mental Health Foundation will fund \$180,000 of the work. The Center for Mental Health is providing the land for the 5,200-square-foot building and the county is picking up about \$800,000 of the cost.

Once construction is completed, the county will own the building, the Center for Mental Health will continue to own the land and Western Montana Mental Health Services will provide the programming, Hunthausen said.

In addition to the construction cost will be the expense for appliances and furnishings, said Eric Bryson, the county's chief administrative officer.

Blair said she anticipated there would be six people staffing the facility during the day and two people on staff at night. Additional personnel could be called to assist as needed.

Jason M. Davis, a principal and managing partner of SMA Architects, said elements of the company's design for the building, such as the roof lines, were intended to reflect the residential quality of the neighborhood while other architectural elements acknowledged nearby commercial structures.

The various groups who participated in the design, such as the Mental Health Local Advisory Council, helped to shape the outcome, Davis said, adding, "It really is a community building."

The county spends more than \$300,000 annually on mental health services, the majority of which is for caring for people in crises, Hunthausen said.

"We're hoping that by providing that care locally, we will save some of that money," he added.

Journey Home, as the new facility is named, will have six beds for those who voluntarily come for short-term treatment and two additional beds in a secure area for those who are involuntarily being held because they may be a danger to themselves or others.

The facility would be used for a few days to help people move beyond their personal crisis that could be due to an illness, their medicine or events in their lives.

This would be a place for those who can't be at home and who don't need to be hospitalized, Hunthausen has said previously.

A facility for those in crisis fills a need in the community, many of those who supported construction said.

Sheriff Leo Dutton is among those who are pleased to see construction start on a crisis stabilization facility.

People accused of a crime and exhibiting signs of mental illness can be taken to the state hospital in Warm Springs to be held until being retrieved for an appearance in court here, Dutton said. They may then be transported back to the state hospital by the sheriff's office.

Others may be held in jail but mental health services have to be brought in to the jail for them, he added.

"Having everything under one roof will be a real benefit to the person," Dutton said.

The secure beds in the facility will save on trips to the state hospital and will mean family members of those accused of a crime won't have to make the trip to Warm Springs for visits, Dutton said. "That's why this is good in so many ways."

The facility's name, Thomas told the audience for the groundbreaking, reflected its purpose.

"You're always going through a journey as you're going through a mental health struggle," he said. "This is a great step forward for mental health in this community."