



The Chairman's Corner

by

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MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC

Following a stretch of time during which the Columbia County Mental Health Center had experienced a staffing shortage, county Human Services and county Mental Health Center Director of Community Services Dan Almasi and Deputy Director/Director of Clinical Services Kate Sprague are here to say “that’s no longer the situation. Our doors are wide open and we have the capacity to fully serve the public.”

Currently, the Mental Health Center is serving “a tick above 750 admitted cases, and we could easily absorb another 300 clients,” added Director Almasi.

OPEN ACCESS CLINIC

The Open Access walk-in clinic returned last September, said Deputy Director Sprague. “Our walk-in clinic is now open Monday and Tuesday mornings from 8:30-10:30. An individual can walk in without an appointment and there will be a clinician. They will also meet with a nurse to perform a health monitoring evaluation to check their general medical well-being. At that time they may also undergo a social determinance of health to screen for possible obstacles to treatment, such as food insecurity, insurance, transportation, and things like educational or vocational goals they haven’t been able to meet because of their mental health issues. We may be able to make referrals that help that individual cure some of those barriers.”

A certified peer specialist is important to the process as “someone who has lived experience with a mental health issue. They’re in a unique position to use that experience to speak with someone and reveal their personal history, whereas for a licensed clinical social worker or a psychologist it’s generally not appropriate to do that,” said Director Almasi.

Apart from the walk-in clinic, appointments can be scheduled for Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, added Deputy Director Sprague.

CRISIS SERVICES

When it comes to crisis services, anyone can walk in at any point during clinic hours from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., she said. “If they’re in crisis and really need help in the moment, they can meet with a clinician. If the clinic is closed and someone in need of help calls, no matter whether it’s 11 at night or 4:30 in the morning, it will be answered by someone at the Columbia County Sheriff’s Office and they will reach out to an after-hours on-call person, who will speak with the caller at that time.”

GROUP THERAPY

On another note, said Deputy Director Sprague, “groups are something we’ve been working on getting up and running again – a lot of them had been stopped because of Covid. I’m happy to say we’re getting back on track with group therapy. Our emotional regulation group is thriving.” Other groups are in various stages of getting up and running.

“Groups are a critical part of some peoples’ treatment,” she said. “I think that getting in a room with peers that are struggling with the same thing, oftentimes someone struggling with a similar issue can really get to the heart of it. It can be an integral part of someone’s mental health recovery process.”

“There’s a new energy and fresh faces at the Mental Health Clinic and we want the public to know that,” said Deputy Director Sprague. “We’re committed to making sure we are person-centered and compassionate, a place where people can feel comfortable and welcomed.”

The Columbia County Mental Health Clinic can be contacted at 518-828-9446, or by visiting columbiacountymhc.com