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Monday Matters: Comprehensive Juvenile Services Eyes New Shelter At Chaffee Crossing



JUSTIN BATES • TIMES RECORD Comprehensive Juvenile Services Executive Director John Furness speaks at the agency's office in Fort Smith on Tuesday about a planned facility which would replace the agency's existing Western Arkansas Youth Shelter in Cecil. The agency was awarded a \$50,000 challenge grant from the Windgate Charitable Foundation to assist in building the proposed new facility at Chaffee Crossing.

[image](#)

By Justin Bates

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To enhance and expand its services, [Comprehensive Juvenile Services](#) has been awarded a grant to assist in constructing a new youth shelter at Chaffee Crossing. The private, Fort Smith-based nonprofit agency provides a variety of services to delinquent and at-risk youth and their families across seven counties in western Arkansas. The agency employs 40 full- and part-time staff and operates on a \$1.7 million annual budget, according to Executive Director John Furness.

The agency serves more than 1,200 youths annually, the majority of whom are referrals from juvenile courts.

Part of the agency's services is an emergency shelter, located in Cecil in Franklin County, which provides room and board, counseling, casework and crisis intervention for youths who are at a higher risk of entering the juvenile justice system.

The agency has operated the Western Arkansas Youth Shelter in Cecil since 1984. According to CJS Assistant Director Janice Justice, in the 31 years the shelter has been in operation, more than 4,300 youths have passed through the program.

The existing facility has 14 beds, providing housing for six girls and eight boys. Youths may stay at the facility for up to 60 days while CJS caseworkers work with them and their families to resolve the issues that have placed them at the facility.

“It provides an intervention and is a safe alternative to the street or being confined in a secure facility,” Furness said. “Our No. 1 goal is to work through the problems and reunite the families. The kids we see are at risk of being delinquent, and we want to keep them in the community.”

Furness said the agency and shelter see recidivism, or repeat offenders, minimally, which he credits to the numerous services provided by the agency, including casework, mentoring, mental health assessments and therapy, as well community service programs and home monitoring.

Justice said many of the youths have gone on to lead successful and productive lives, thanks at least in part to the care and the “listening ear” they received at the shelter.

Justice said the facility is located in an 85-year-old building, which the agency does not own, although it provides maintenance and upkeep. She estimated that since 1987, CJS has spent more than \$200,000 in maintenance and repairs to the building.

Because of that, Justice said, the agency began crafting plans to build a new, energy-efficient building.

Current plans call for the proposed 7,400-square-foot facility to be built on the two acres at Chaffee Crossing the agency purchased in 2005. It will be designed to accommodate 16 residents and will include a larger dining hall, a recreational area, more office space and room for expansion.

The facility’s current \$1.5 million price tag is lofty, but Justice said a capital fundraising campaign is underway. To date the agency has raised \$436,640, she said.

Now, a \$50,000 “challenge” matching grant from the Windgate Charitable Foundation of Siloam Springs will further assist in efforts to relocate and build the facility.

Justice said the current shelter has proved detrimental to the efficiency of the facility and the families of the youths it serves, as it is an 84-mile round trip from the Fort Smith and Van Buren area, where, she estimated, 65 percent of the youths who utilize the facility reside.

Justice added relocating the shelter to Chaffee Crossing would reduce transportation costs for families and would save the agency money on its utility bills, thus allowing CJS to be even better stewards of the funds allotted to the operation of the shelter.

Furness said although the agency was awarded the grant, it will be payable only when the matching goal has been met and that the agency needs the help of the community to raise the funds to meet the Windgate Foundation’s challenge.

Mike Stanton, president of the Comprehensive Juvenile Services Foundation Board of Directors, spoke of the need to build a new facility.

Stanton said a new energy-efficient space would not only benefit the agency financially, but also would have a positive impact on the children the facility serves and their families.

He praised the work of CJS staff and their efforts to secure the money to build the facility.

“They won’t pat themselves on the back, but it’s worth noting that these are people who are there for the right reason,” Stanton said. “They go above and beyond. They aren’t trying to build the Taj Mahal, there’s no bureaucracy over there, they’re just trying to do what they can to improve their services.”

- See more at: <http://swtimes.com/news/monday-matters-comprehensive-juvenile-services-eyes-new-shelter-chaffee-crossing#sthash.1ZVF06h5.dpuf>