



Connie Beck, Director
Social Services | Public Health | Behavioral Health

news release

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Multimillion-dollar grant to assist local youth in crisis

Thanks in part to a \$5.1 million grant from the Investment in Mental Health Wellness Grant Program for Children, Humboldt County will soon have a residential facility for children and youth experiencing mental health crises.

Fortuna-based Pediatrician Dr. Evan Buxbaum said he regularly sees children in his practice who are experiencing depression and anxiety. "Our children had been experiencing mental health crises even before COVID, but the events of the past year have made issues around adolescent mental health significantly worse." Dr. Buxbaum added that when children in Humboldt County become suicidal or experience a mental health crisis, there is often no place to send them for care locally, so they get placed on a psychiatric hold in a local emergency room while they wait for a residential treatment center or psychiatric hospital bed to open up out of county. This year, that wait has extended to days or sometimes weeks due to a severe shortage of youth residential beds in the state.

Recognizing there had to be a better way, Dr. Buxbaum started searching for ways to bring a crisis residential treatment facility to the county and approached Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) Children's Behavioral Health Division to apply for money to create a crisis stabilization and residential treatment center in Humboldt.

Jeremy Nilsen, deputy director for DHHS's Children's Behavioral Health Division, said a facility such as this will greatly benefit the county's youth. "This facility will provide a treatment option in-between outpatient services and inpatient hospitalization," he said. "It will offer intensive services to youth and their families locally and can be an alternative to out-of-county hospitalization."

DHHS Director Connie Beck said receiving these funds is a game changer. "This grant will provide a local facility with services for youth that will help reduce the number who are unfortunately sent out of the area for treatment and will allow them to stay connected to their community."

The facility will be owned and run by a local nonprofit medical group created by Dr. Buxbaum and staffed by a pediatrician, nurse practitioners, pediatric and adolescent-trained counselors, social workers and case managers, as well as a full support staff. Psychiatric oversight will take place via telepsychiatry, and the facility will provide participants with a full array of Behavioral Health supports. The organization will be a service provider that DHHS contracts with.

“Youth being served at the facility will get intensive help to stabilize them during a time of crisis,” Nilsen said. “The facility will offer a variety of services such as therapy and medication support, and staff will work with families to quickly set up longer-term services and supports needed to maintain stability.”

Dr. Buxbaum said the facility will be modeled after other “trauma-informed, evidence-based” residential care programs for youth in a mental health crisis. “These facilities focus on counseling, somatic experience, mindfulness, healthy coping mechanisms and the integration of family and community into the healing journey and rely less on excessive medication.”

Currently, Dr. Buxbaum said his organization is in the process of purchasing a facility that would provide rooms for nine residential beds, three stabilization beds and include a Children’s Crisis Residential Program to meet the needs of individuals from 7 to 21 years old experiencing moderate to severe mental health crises.

“We feel extraordinarily fortunate to be able to bring this service to Humboldt County and look forward to working with our young people in need, their families, the service providers already doing amazing work in our community and County Behavioral Health to create something extraordinary,” Dr. Buxbaum said.

DHHS Behavioral Health Director Emi Botzler-Rodgers agrees, “A children’s crisis residential treatment program is an incredible opportunity for our community to support our youth. It will allow us to keep them local and connected to family and community supports. It is also wonderful to be able to partner with Dr. Buxbaum’s group. It allows us to bring together expertise and resources in a way that maximizes the potential for a really amazing and successful program.”

Nilsen said he is looking forward to the positive impact this will have in the community, “Simply put, this is a great opportunity for our county and our county’s youth.”

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