

## Calm Harbor offers sanctuary

*Facility cuts inpatient costs*

By JOHN BUCHEL - For the Daily News

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The utilization of a former boys' home as a short-term residential facility has aided Washington County's transition to a proactive approach to mental health care while providing a safe haven for disturbed individuals to cope, recover and grow.

As part of its new recovery-based model, the county's Comprehensive Community Services Agency now contracts inpatient mental health care services to Synergy-Health St. Joseph's, offering an around-the-clock acute care crisis service to help diffuse emergency detentions. The county also contracted Nova Services, a non-profit corporation which has served the community for 30 years, to operate Calm Harbor, a community-based residential care facility which offers patients stabilization in crisis situations and the social support they need to sustain their recovery.

Since it opened in August 2005, Calm Harbor has admitted 201 clients, who have stayed around six days on average. More than one-third of those admissions have been in the 29-to-38 age group, followed by 39-48 (more than one-quarter) and 18-28 (one-fifth). The mobile crisis case workers have increasingly used Calm Harbor as a resource, which has contributed to the new treatment approach's impressive reduction in inpatient admissions and emergency detentions.



John Buchel

*Calm Harbor adult care worker Barb Crawford stands in the kitchen of the live-in facility. Residents of Calm Harbor help in preparing all their own meals and eat together as a community to improve their everyday lifestyle skills.*

Calm Harbor provides social support to ease patients transition back to the community following a hospitalization and maintain their recovery. Clients can tie up loose ends, from rebuilding positive communication skills to filing paperwork, to recognizing and coping with their own instabilities. "I know if I start to feel low or if I'm concerned about something, I'll pick up the phone," to call acute care services, said Mary, a resident of West Bend who has stayed at Calm Harbor.

(Patients and former patients' names were not used for this article). Crisis workers can counsel her over the phone or in person and may recommend a stay at Calm Harbor. "I know that this is a safe place to come to," she said.

Nova Services executive director Thomas Bozewicz and Calm Harbor director Phil Harper traveled to similar facilities in other counties and looked for the best practices they could import to West Bend. They often found situations which seemed counterproductive to recovery, such as patients vegetating in front of televisions. "I looked at Phil and I said, 'This can't be good,'" Bozewicz said.

In developing Calm Harbor, they wanted to create a safe, homey atmosphere for clients. By sitting down to breakfast and helping to prepare meals, for example, clients gain family lifelike structure, daily living skills and a psychological anchor. "It routinely provides you with that support. You get up in the morning and have a normal breakfast, whereas if you just go home and go back to bed you're missing those important daily living steps," said Mary, who felt comfortable enough at Calm Harbor to go there for Thanksgiving. Only two people were admitted that day, but about 10 recovered clients joined the staff for dinner. "That was a good time," said Sadie of West Bend, who has stayed at Calm Harbor. "I've been in group homes quite a bit and it's very rare to find a place where you can get along with everybody. You're definitely not a number here." This type of personal connection has been vital to the success of the home, according to staff. The seasoned staff has varied experience from mental health care and counseling to drug and alcohol rehabilitation and sheriff's department work, and provide an environment less sterile and institutionalized than the hospital. "We wear many hats here. We love our jobs," said house manager Mary Stein. "And for the clients, coming here is way better than going there."

Susie, a former Calm Harbor resident who now shares an apartment with Sadie, said while the home is not a substitute for hospitalized care, it is a much more pleasant alternative. As a social worker with decades of experience, Harper knew medication often posed problems for patients. "We noticed a number of admission to the inpatient unit were (for) the person not taking, or mistaking, their medications," Harper said. "So why should they sit there for three or four days, at a cost of maybe \$1,000 per day?" Six clients make daily stops at Calm Harbor to make sure they have properly taken their medicine. Sadie said she must take 12 pills each morning and eight each night, some for physical issues and some for mental, which can easily become confusing. "It's just a little reminder, which is helpful," said Susie. "They also work on goals here, as far as taking your meds, feeling safe or just eating a meal."

Nova Services business manager Kathy Fies said the nonprofit's 2006 contract with the county was for around \$387,000, with which Calm Harbor maintains the eight-bed, 24-hour staff, full kitchen, an intoxication surveillance bed and an auxiliary office for the acute care services crisis team. Admitted clients have already spent more than 1,000 individual days in care at Calm Harbor, making the savings palpable. "I think we have to give credit to the County Board," Fies said. "They're not only saving the county money, they're providing better care."