

Clinic: Addresses crises that demand swift attention

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McKee said.

A low-barrier drop-in center

Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, Clatsop County's mental health and substance abuse treatment contractor, moved into the building just as the pandemic began. The site was originally planned for adult and child-and-family outpatient services, but those got moved to the agency's location at Exchange and 12th streets.

The clinic began as a response to something the agency began noticing at that location: People would walk in asking for help in moments of crisis — not the kind of crisis that requires hospital care or intervention from the agency's mobile crisis unit, but that demands swift attention — from panic attacks and housing needs, to psychosis and intense suicidal thoughts.

Normally, such people would have to contact the agency and schedule an appointment for a few days out. But for someone with pressing needs, a few days is a long time. By then, the moment may have passed. And some people's control over their lives is so tenuous that keeping appointments, even in the near future, is too much to handle.

For people using heroin or other opiates and want to quit, "you gotta be there at the right time," Negrea said, "so when somebody comes in, you gotta jump on that, when they're motivated."

The Rapid Access Clinic has therapists and counselors, clinicians for treating addiction to drugs and alcohol, staff who have experienced addiction themselves and now "walk alongside" clients to help them through their recovery, McKee said. The goal is to get people into ongoing care.

Amy Baker, the execu-



Lydia Ely/The Astorian

The reset room is decorated in shades of blue and has a tray with balls, cards and other activities.

utive director of Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, said at a county Board of Commissioners work session in October that many people who seek treatment often stop coming after one or two sessions.

She hopes, with the clinic, that the agency will be able to retain people longer. "Usually people show up to see us when they're in crisis. There are very few people who are like, 'Hey, you know what? I think I'm gonna start counseling today because that'd be good for me!'" Nobody does that," Baker said. "They get to the end of their rope and they push themselves, or somebody pushes them, and they come find us ... Our job is to hold onto them as long as possible so that they can actually experience some improvement."

The clinic has a Genoa Healthcare pharmacy and, within weeks, will start filling clients' mental health medications.

The clinic dispenses

Suboxone, a medication for people — whether active opioid users looking to quit or ex-users trying to stay clean — to manage their cravings and withdrawal symptoms.

The staff hands out tents and sleeping bags — more than 60 pairs of these since the weather turned cold — backpacks packed with hygiene supplies, feminine products, hats and scarves, gloves and socks.

And when people come needing housing or a meal, the staff refers them to places like Clatsop Community Action and Filling Empty Bellies.

McKee estimates that about 300 people have received services at the clinic since July.

'No judgment'

At first, some clients will often come in, get nervous, maybe announce that they have something else to do or that they'll come back later. "But then folks come back, and there's no judgment,"

Negrea said. "It's like, 'All right, cool, we'll be here. We've gotten started, so ... whenever you're ready.'"

Negrea, who is trained in both mental health and addiction treatment, has written up treatment plans in the reset room, a quiet, carpeted space that contains a couch with fuzzy green pillows, a small collection of toys (playing cards, Koosh balls, Rubik's Cube, etc.) and a painting that reads "relax." The room is often used to calm people

who are agitated, intoxicated or having a psychotic episode.

For the apprehensive, verbally challenged homeless man, Negrea sat, clipboard in hand, on the back steps with him, the man's shopping cart beside them.

Some people will drop in once or twice; others will show up a couple of times, then turn up a month later. "Not rushing them, just being here," Negrea said. A handful — including the homeless man — have, so

far, stayed in treatment.

The clinic has not actively promoted itself, but word is spreading.

A homeless middle-aged woman who camps near the older man came in. She mentioned that she had seen how well her friend had been doing lately compared to where he had been. She said she figured that, if he's getting better, the clinic can't be a bad place.

She has started getting mental health treatment there, as well.



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