

CCS ends day treatment for at risk youth

BY JOHN TILLMAN

Hermiston Herald

Umatilla County's mental health and addiction treatment provider Community Counseling Solutions has closed its mental health day-treatment program for at-risk children under 12. CCS Executive Director Kimberly Lindsay said it was a difficult decision but circumstances forced the move.

"It was not taken lightly," she said. Our employees genuinely care about the people we serve. While technically it was a "decision" to end the program, we really had very few options."

Operating a day-treatment program requires a license from the state, she explained. The license requires various services to be delivered, including therapy by a master's level clinician.

"A key individual resigned this position within day treatment in early May," Lindsay said. "We informed the schools, InterMountain Education Service District and the Umatilla County commissioners about the potential impact of the program workforce shortage."

CCS strove to fill the position, including offering a \$10,000 sign-on bonus.

"We did not have one applicant," Lindsay reported. "We cannot operate the program if we are out of compliance with the state regulations. Given this, we did notify the state at the end of June of the need to discontinue the program."

CCS also notified day treatment employees and families the closure would affect, she said, and is in constant communication with its other community partners, including Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center and Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc.

"We are continuing to operate the



Mackenzie Whaley/Hermiston Herald, File

Community Counseling Solutions, Umatilla County's mental health and addiction treatment provider, is open at its Pendleton location July 14, 2022. CCS reported in early June it had to close the mental health day-treatment program for at-risk children under 12 due to a lack of staff with proper certification.

summer program for the enrolled children, albeit modified, through mid-August," Lindsay said. "This program is fully funded by CCS."

The organization's staff is meeting with InterMountain Education Service District and contacted schools to schedule meetings with with enrolled students. Lindsay said CCS plans to meet with each family and individual and affected schools to develop a plan of care to provide as smooth of a transition as is possible.

All but one of 11 children enrolled in the program are in Pendleton School District, she said.

"We will redirect the funding that was used for day treatment to pro-

vide skills training in Umatilla County schools," Lindsay said. "Five positions have been created, one supervisory. We will work closely with the schools to ensure that their mental health personnel are doing what they can to support the highest needs kids."

CCS considered the option of pulling a clinician from the children's outpatient program to work in day treatment.

"Due to the number of unfilled positions, all existing clinicians have higher caseloads," Lindsay said. "Any of those existing clinicians could have applied for the day treatment positions. When you compel a person to change positions, it generally causes discontent, and the person may leave the agency.

That would have exacerbated the issue, and the individuals who are currently on their caseload would have to transition to a clinician who already had a full caseload. No one wants to choose which clients are most important. Every enrolled child is at risk."

CCS inherited the program from Lifeways, which received funding from GOBHI until 2019, Lindsay said. Losing those resources meant that children over 12 no longer could be served in day treatment. The number dropped from more than 20 to today's 11 children participating in the program. CCS relied on funding from the Oregon Health Authority.

CCS agreed to take over behavioral

health services in Umatilla County during a workforce shortage occurring nationally, she noted.

"The health care sector has been particularly hard hit," Lindsay said. "The clinician shortage is not just occurring in Umatilla County, but across the state and nation."

Lindsay expressed great appreciation for the grace and patience Umatilla County community members have shown during the mental health staff shortage.

"We do try hard on a daily basis to provide a great service," she said. "We'll continue to put our best foot forward. We are looking at all options to fill vacant positions, and are committed to providing quality services."

Julie Smith, director of special programs in the Pendleton School District, recognized closing day treatment was beyond CCS' control.

"You can't provide therapy without therapists," she said. "It's one less service available to our families experiencing trauma such that they need to partner with CCS, even if not in a therapeutic session. It's hard for families with unresolved mental health issues."

Smith noted the shortage of trained professionals and other mental health resources, as well.

"Specialized, highly trained therapists with the requisite clinical experience aren't just sitting around," she said. "We provided services during the school day for a number of years, but COVID put the kibosh on that. Some of the highest need students can't even get to school."

Smiths aid she hopes that pooling resources in the county allows at-risk children to get the help they need in school, as outpatients at CCS, Yellowhawk or with other providers.

Stretch of 100-plus days one of hottest on record

BY ANTONIO ARREDONDO

Hermiston Herald

Last week's summer heat wave wasn't just hot. The week-long stretch was one of the hottest periods in Umatilla County history.

Ann Adams, assistant forecaster of the National Weather Service, shared details on the heat, which stayed above 100 degrees for seven days starting July 25 and ending July 31.

The stretch is one of the longest periods of sustained heat in Pendleton history, Adams said. It's the second year in a row the county saw summer records af-

ter an extremely hot 2021 summer. While most of that summer's heat came in late June, it wasn't as concentrated.

"We got pretty warm last year, but the days were spread out a lot," Adams said.

There was no week in 2021 where every day saw temperatures rise above 100 degrees. Meanwhile, the week of July 25, 2022, is tied for the second-longest mark in Pendleton history at seven days.

The record for most consecutive days with high temperatures above the century mark is 11 back in August 1967. While

that stretch was longer, the days were slightly cooler, if above 100 degrees can be considered "cool."

The average high temperature in 1967 during their record stretch was 102.5 degrees. Conversely, the average high of the stretch this July was nearly 4 degrees warmer at 106.1 degrees. Of the three stretches of heat of more than a week in Pendleton history — the other being a week in July 1968 — the latest is the hottest on record.

The Hermiston area may have hotter annual averages than Pendleton, but this didn't

stop the heat from setting other records. The city saw the same seven-day streak of above 100 degree days starting July 25.

While this stretch may fall to fifth place in terms of length — Hermiston dealt with 14 days of heat in June of 2015 — it still has the hottest stretch of the top five.

In addition to an average high temperature of 107.3 degrees, Hermiston set three daily records during the stretch. Ac-

cording to the National Weather Service website, the temperatures on July 28, 29 and 30 were all the hottest on record.

July 29 was the hottest day in recorded history for July in both cities. Pendleton saw a high of 111 degrees, while Hermiston had a high of 112 degrees.

The other two days saw slightly lower marks, but still set daily records. July 28 had a high of 108 degrees in Pendleton and

109 degrees in Hermiston, and July 30 was 110 degrees in both cities. Adams says these temperatures are about 15 degrees higher than the average high for the time.

The heat may have died down this week, but it should come roaring back by Monday, Aug. 8. Adams said temperatures should rise past 100 degrees again, with a high of 102 degrees in Pendleton and 104 degrees in Hermiston.

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