

# County's mentally ill wait years for homes

By Susan DeMaggio  
staff writer

The deputy director of the county's Community Mental Health Center is the first to admit things could be better.

Peter Bickelmann estimates that 5 percent of Oakland County's 1.1 million residents require the services of the Mental Health Center, but the system can only afford to help 1 percent or 11,000 people. Oakland is the second wealthiest county in the country with population over the million mark.

"The waiting list for placement into some kind of nonforfeited home is 18 years long. Some 415 people are on it. It's absurd to call it a waiting list. It's a joke," he said. "Most of these people are the children of elderly parents who have taken care of a mentally retarded or mentally ill child since the 1950s."

"They have saved the taxpayers a lot of money, but

now they are getting too old, too tired. They want help, but the help is not there for them. It's a shame. These people are taxpayers, too."

In 1988, the Oakland County Chapter of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Michigan, brought a class action suit against the state and the county charging they do not provide the care for the mentally disabled required by law, the state's Mental Health Code.

The suit precedes Gov. John Engler's controversial move to community-managed mental health care. Once it is effected, Oakland County will decide where and how mental health dollars will be used.

DOLORES HOWELL of Royal Oak is president of the Alliance. There are 1,000 families on their mailing list, most dealing with either schizophrenic or manic depressive family members.

She said the suit is still pending with lawyers taking depositions, experts being called in and witnesses com-

ing forth.

"Our needs are getting more attention," she said. "But they're not being addressed. It all boils down to money — or the lack of it."

Howell has a 38-year-old son with a chronic mental illness. Her family's struggle to care for and support him through episodic bouts of hospitalization led her to the Alliance.

"In our suit we call for a hospital as back-up," she said. "We'd hate for them to close the Clinton Valley Center (a state psychiatric facility in Pontiac). Although it's old, it's there for us. People with mental illnesses occasionally require hospitalization."

"Also we want more services in the community. We want more case management workers who will follow a patient six weeks to two months after they are released from the hospital," she continued.

"MOST PSYCHIATRIC PATIENTS can't manage in

their family home. They've burned bridges. Also, they need independence, fresh starts. The Alliance would like to see more supervised housing centers where medications can be properly dispensed, where patients can meet with social workers and psychiatrists, where patients can meet others with the same concerns."

The Alliance suit ends with the call for a complete range of housing facilities, from six-bed group homes to supportive apartments; day programs that are psychological, social, vocational and rehabilitative; supported employment; respite care for those with mentally ill family members at home.

The Oakland County Board of Commissioners recently approved the appropriation of \$220,000 for respite care over the next two years.

Howell said many agencies are overjoyed at the decision which, they quickly add, was half of what they asked for.



Center director Gloria Allerton and assistant James Watson know from their own experience what patients are going through.

## Drop-in center gives patients daytime haven

By Susan DeMaggio  
staff writer

They took the old white, crumbling, condemned house on the corner of Saginaw and Clark Streets in Pontiac and turned it into a haven.

Every day 60 to 70 different mental health patients drop by the place to drink a cup of coffee, play the piano, shoot some pool or just talk about their day.

It's only F.A.I.R. — Friends Assisting In Recovery — and it's all that stands between them and the streets.

"F.A.I.R. offers a secure and safe atmosphere to help individuals develop courage, share their feelings,

and express themselves," said Gloria Allerton, director of the center. "We're the only center in Oakland County where people in the system (clients of the county's community mental health division) can go on a drop-in basis while they are recovering."

Allerton runs F.A.I.R. Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. She treats it like her own home and expects guests to do the same.

RULES ARE POSTED throughout the center and no matter what your handicap, you pick up your own coffee cup, wipe up your own doughnut crumbs and put things back where

you found them.

"James Watson, my assistant, helps me maintain order," she explained. "We make sure all our guests are legitimate, in the system. Sometimes we have to ask the homeless who wander in to move on. We've had to ask some of our regulars to leave on occasion, but most of the time, it's all smiles, handshakes and good times."

The "consumers" as Allerton calls them, help plan and run the center. "This motivates them to socialize and mobilize for self-sufficiency," she said. "I myself have been in the system, so has James. We understand the needs of our guests and we respect them. We get this respect

right back."

Allerton has directed F.A.I.R. for the past three years. She watched the old house go from dilapidation to delight.

"We painted, planted yellow flowers, hung curtains, built cabinets, renovated staircases and put down carpeting," she proudly pointed out. "And the rest of this old block was motivated to do a little sprucing up itself. Fred Testruth has been our handyman-gardener. He's done a lot to make a difference in this place."

F.A.I.R.'S REPUTATION has earned it plaques of recognition from the city of Pontiac, assorted state senators, and other mental

health agencies. Their work is supported by Focus Hope, Lighthouse, the Oakland County Community Mental Health Center and private donations.

Each morning boxes of complimentary doughnuts arrive from the Dunkin' Donuts shop at Telegraph and Elizabeth Lake roads.

Allerton is currently trying to set up a bowling league for drop-ins in cooperation with the Clubhouse, another center for the mentally ill just down the street. The Clubhouse, directed by Chris Lustig, is a new agency where organized programs are offered which require members to register for participation.

Both of these programs are ad-

ministered by the county's department of mental health services.

David stops by F.A.I.R. every day. "It's everything to me," he said. "I've met a lot of friends here, different people. I really like it."

CHARLOTTE agreed, as she pulled on a coat and scarf and headed out the door.

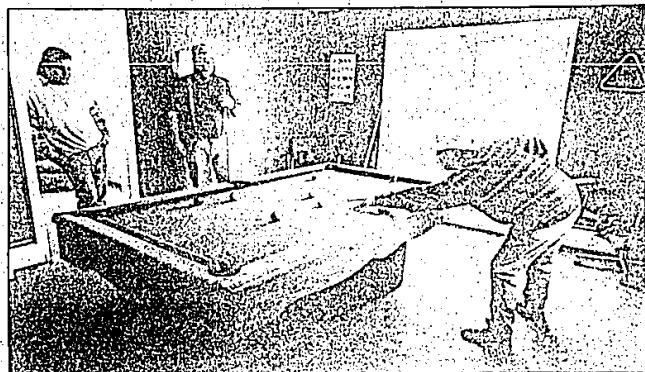
"I'll be back later, Gloria," she said. "I'm off to the soup kitchen to get some lunch."

"Okay, we'll be here," Allerton assured her.

And that's good news for everyone.

For more information about F.A.I.R., call the center at 334-6667.

Smokers with coffee sit around the designated smoking room.



Rules of the house are clearly displayed in the upstairs pool room.



David makes another pot of over-present coffee.

Staff photos by Dan Dean.

**Handcrafters  
ARTS & CRAFTS  
SHOW**

April 10, 11, 12  
Fri. 9-9 Sat. 9-5 Sun. 11-5  
OVER 70 JURIED CRAFTSMEN  
at the  
NORTHVILLE RECREATION CENTER  
1 1/2 blocks west of Center Street (Sheldon  
Road) on Main Street - Northville, Michigan

Admission 11:50 Lunch Available No baby strollers please

Promoters: Sue Smith, Mary Peterson P.O. Box 87244  
Canton, MI 48107-0444 (313) 397-1650

Consignment Works for You

**Buy At Factory Cost  
NOT Retail**

We Get Factory Consignments:  
• Factory overruns • Factory duplicates • Special orders

Estate Furniture and Accessories:  
Buy at Fraction of Original Cost...

• Brand names Drexel, Heritage, Baker, Henredon, Bedroom,  
Dining Room, Living Room and Accessories.

Factory Consignments Now In Stock!

• FULL SIZE MATTRESS SETS  
Retail Value \$599 ONLY \$199 set

• QUEEN SIZE MATTRESS SETS  
Retail Value \$699 ONLY \$299 set

• DOUGLAS DINING SETS  
Retail Value \$599 FROM \$299

• NEW SOFAS • RECLINERS  
DINING ROOMS

**the GREAT EXCHANGE**  
CONSIGNMENT COMPANY

1431 W. 14 Mile Rd. • Madison Heights, MI 48071  
Campbell Corners Center  
2 blocks W. of I-76  
(313) 589-0390

Hours: Daily 10-6, Fri. 10-8, Sat. 10-6, Sunday 12-5

**A GENUINE LEATHER RECLINER  
AT A PRICE YOU CAN AFFORD**

Reg. \$1800 NOW ONLY  
**\$999**

With Bradington-Young chairs that recline it takes a second look to discover their hidden beauty. This beautiful bustle back wing chair is upholstered completely in genuine leather with the sturdy frame and mechanism you've come to expect from Bradington-Young.

Limited quantities are available in blue and green but you can choose from 43 other colors in 3 different leathers by special order at this sensational price. Sale ends Saturday, April 18.

**Stewart Glenn**  
of Bloomfield Hills

2640 N. Woodward Ave.  
Just South of Square Lake Rd.  
First Furniture Since 1917

332-8348  
Open Mon., Thurs. 11-6 p.m.  
Tues., Wed., Sat. 10-5 p.m.