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In the Spirit of Great Community Banking.

Treatment center to shut down

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By JENNIFER BLENNER

Turning Point will be closing its doors after 31 years in the Township of Cedar Grove.

The short-term residential addiction treatment center plans to shut down its facility in the township Aug. 1, said its executive director, Dr. Manuel Guantez.

"Our ultimate wish is to remain in Essex County," said Guantez. "We were told to move by the county because there is no space, that's a reality and it's no one's fault. We have not seen anything so far to indicate that remaining in the county is a possibility. However, we remain hopeful that someone, someday will create an opportunity for us to remain in the county."

Several years ago, Essex County officials sold the property, where Turning Point is located, to homebuilder K. Hovnanian. County and state officials are trying to find a permanent home, but no land or buildings are available.

Due to the impending closing, Guantez announced that the agency would be significantly reducing its capacity and staff would be laid off.

The 112 employees will be reduced by 30 to 50 percent by Aug 1.

Additionally, Turning Point has begun reducing its client admissions and is consolidating its reduced programs to its other facility in Secaucus.

The agency is also in negotiations to rent a temporary home outside of Essex County for its women's programs, which includes treatment for pregnant women and those with co-occurring mental illness.

"The biggest impact is we won't be able to provide any women's services," he said, adding this affects pregnant women, women referred by the Department of Youth and Family Services and women with co-occurring disorders.

The closing will have a ripple effect in Cedar Grove and in surrounding communities that rely on the agency's treatment programs.

Diane Anglin, vice president of Real House Inc. in Montclair, a shelter for homeless women that deals with obstacles such as substance abuse, domestic violence and mental illness, said closing the facility will be a significant loss to the community.

"When Turning Point closes, it's obvious that many people out here won't get the treatment they need," she said.

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Sue Garfinkel, executive director of COPE Center in Montclair, an outpatient facility specializing in family crisis, AIDS and anger management, echoed similar concerns. Like Real House Inc., the center refers many of its clients to Turning Point because it is a recognized treatment program.

“It is going to be a challenge,” she said. “There are going to be less beds and we are going to be scrambling to find a good safe treatment program for our clients.”

Over the years, Turning Point has made several attempts to find a permanent home but have had no luck.

A couple of weeks ago, Essex County officials indicated that with Hovnanian’s help, they could remain at the current facility in Cedar Grove for another six months.

“We appreciate the offer, but the timing and the short-term nature of the offer does not resolve the necessity of Turning Point finding a permanent home,” he said.

“It just postpones the inevitable.”

Last year, representatives from former Gov. Richard Codey’s office, and the divisions of Mental Health Services and Addiction Services expressed their interest in helping Turning Point find a new home.

The agency was notified that a state-owned property outside of Essex County would not be available for at least 18 months. Since that time, nothing has been finalized.

“We continue to work with Turning Point to look at several locations and are working out the details,” said Ellen Lovejoy, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services.

Essex County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo expressed his willingness to secure Turning Point a facility in the county.

“We are looking at different municipalities,” he said. “I have been looking for the past five years, and we will continue to look and we are committed to helping them out because they do good work.”

Guantez remains ever optimistic that the agency will find a new home and eventually expand its services. “In the end, Turning Point will not only have a home, we are optimistic we will expand to 180-200 beds and expand our programs.”