

Substance abuse treatment in Gallup: Where do we go from here?

Written by By Beth Blakeman Managing Editor
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Four Corners Detox Recovery Center picks up the ball

When NCI (Na Nizhoozhi Center) was closed down during the pandemic, the state's Behavioral Health Services Division approached the Santa Fe Recovery Center for help.

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Santa Fe Recovery, which was established in 2005, became the parent of a Gallup branch now-called Four Corners Detox Recovery Center. The newly-established operation opened in January.

Then, only a few months later, on May 14, Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services suspended operations at the WellSpring Recovery Center.

That's when the detox center decided to expand its services.

On June 24, a little more than a month after WellSpring closed, Four Corners Detox Recovery Center added short-term residential services for substance abuse issues to its menu offerings.

It hired some members of the WellSpring staff.

Both the detox and recovery services are located in the same building, at 2105 Hasler Valley Rd., where there are 45 beds — 30 for detox and 15 for short-term residential stays.

Barry Ore, a licensed mental health counselor, nationally certified counselor, and licensed substance abuse associate counselor, is the program director of the Gallup operation.

He said most of the clients come from the Gallup Indian Medical Center. Ore said the center also takes people from Crownpoint, Zuni, Grants, even Albuquerque hospitals and locations in Arizona.

"We're serving a very wide region of rural areas," he pointed out. He felt that would be helpful to people who have previously had to drive as far as 200 miles to find beds in Phoenix and Santa Fe.

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“We anticipate that the short-term residential program will fill pretty fast and that there will be a waiting list for those services,” he said. “There’s a significant statewide shortage of residential treatment services.”

PROGRAM SERVICES

The center provides medical detox with medical providers, nursing staff, EMTs and medical technicians. There is intensive case management with an emphasis on peer support, counseling, individual and group therapy.

Services are designed to be culturally relevant. Most of the staff is local and representative of the culture and the community.

The center uses holistic intervention, the Navajo Resiliency Model, arts and crafts, gardening, Twelve-step active recovery and traditional healing, and plans to have sweat lodges in the near future.

Short-term residents operate under essentially the same schedule as people in the detox program. They are required to participate in all of the different therapies and are in programs all day.

Because all services are voluntary, people at the center can leave at any time.

Ore said people at the center are assessed by members of the nursing staff, counselors and case managers. They may also be referred to intensive outpatient counseling, shelters or other types of community support, or back to a hospital if they need more treatment.

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Ore said the center's practices are evidence-based and credentialed by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, headquartered in Tucson, Ariz.

The center is a COVID-19 negative facility. All staff members are vaccinated. People not vaccinated are required to wear masks.

STILL TO COME

In addition to the plans for sweat lodges, Ore said the center would like to pursue Arizona Medicaid reimbursement and strengthen its relationship with the Navajo Nation. They are seeking a permanent location, since the building that currently houses the center is leased from the county.

"We would like to expand our levels of care to outpatient and traditional housing, extended residential care," Ore said. "That will take a lot of time ... a continuum of care."

As for WellSpring Recovery Center, RMCHCS interim CEO Don Smithburg acknowledged that there were issues at that location.

"We felt like we had to suspend operations there ... because it was not only financially a huge strain ... It was also a concern from a safety point of view," he said. "Facilities were very old, a lot of deferred maintenance and some other concerns."

Smithburg told the *Sun* the hospital is in active discussions with other organizations as it seeks a partner. The partnership has yet to be defined.

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The hospital will continue to treat acute substance abuse problems, especially those that have comorbidities.

“We’re a general hospital,” Smithburg said. “General hospitals are not aligned around substance abuse recovery, especially residential.

“Acute substance abuse problems we can handle,” he said.