

Street life

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Required by both state regulations and hospital procedures, the plan covers such areas as housing, finances, medication, vocational training and transportation, as well as social and recreational support, according to Robert Tannenbaum, RPC's associate director of community service.

Although he emphasized that RPC's system of follow-up care works for many patients, Tannenbaum acknowledged that such plans may be meaningless and unenforceable in the case of a homeless person.

"One of the major problems in terms of serving homeless individuals is their resistance to accepting traditional services," he said. "The patient needs to be willing to comply with the specified plan, and there are individuals who are treatment-resistant."

"Once that individual is out in the community, we do not have a mandate to make that person comply (with a plan of treatment), he added. "He has the same rights and freedoms as anyone else."

Cooperating with treatment is not always a condition for a patient's release from RPC or similar facilities. Patients who enter the hospital voluntarily and who do not meet the criteria to be held involuntarily have the legal right to leave at any time, Tannenbaum pointed out.

Even in cases of patients who decide to leave against the recommendations of their doctors, RPC staff members must still devise a plan for follow-up care.

Tannenbaum doesn't consider the city's parish shelters or any other emergency facility "optimal" housing for a recently released patient — especially as compared to a certified community residence or proprietary home. But he said that emergency shelters are among the alternatives RPC staff members consider when they are devising patients' follow-up plans.

"There are individuals who, for whatever reasons, seem to be more comfortable in that kind of environment," he said. "For an individual who is homeless, 20 hours of programming (which could be mandated in most certified community residences) may be an intolerable situation."

James, in turn, termed sleeping in an open room with strangers intolerable for many of the patients with whom she has worked. "I'm not sure what information RPC is giving the shelters," she added.

Ann Byrne, a coordinator at Blessed Sacrament, confirmed that although the shelter has housed a number of former RPC patients, shelter workers have been informed of few, if any, referrals from RPC.

"We referred a few people to (RPC) this year," said Father Robert Werth, pastor at St. Bridget's. "But I don't know of anybody they sent to us."

Nevertheless, communication between RPC and the parish shelters has improved during the past several years, according to Tannenbaum. He recalled that, shortly after the parish shelters opened in 1982, staff from RPC's Triage Unit, which screens, evaluates and admits potential patients, offered training sessions for groups of shelter workers.

Representatives from both RPC and the parish shelters are also supporting a Mental Health Association task force, which is sponsoring a study of Rochester's homeless people. Due to be completed late this summer by the Center for Governmental Research, the study will attempt to identify the numbers of homeless, their needs and the services available to them.

Along with parish shelter coordinators and other advocates for the homeless and the mentally ill, Jacqueline James believes a broader range of housing alternatives is at least part of the answer. She would like to see recreation centers operating during the day and more affordable, single-room facilities

"The 'Catch-22' is that they're not ill enough to be a danger to self or others, so there's little you can do in the way of an involuntary mental health arrest. But a lot of people aren't stable enough to follow up with medical care for themselves..."

Elizabeth Quinlan

that would provide meals and a structured program both day and night.

In the meantime, she watches and suffers with her clients as they continue their nightmare journey.

Looking out the window one day this past winter, James recalled seeing one man with whom she had worked, standing on the street corner opposite her office. Coatless and shivering, he was turning first in one direction, then another, apparently trying to decide where to go.

She went out to him and learned that he had just been released from jail. Officials there had directed him to an office to pick up his coat and other clothing. Instead, he got lost and ended up outside.

James took the man back to the jail, picked up his clothes and took him to lunch. At first, he told her that he had a place to stay, but then admitted that he didn't. She took him back to her office and tried to find a bed for him at a shelter. But by the time she had succeeded, he had gone.

"The only thing that would help (in his case) is custodial care, and we can't get it," James said. "So I keep referring him to somebody, and I keep encouraging him to stop by, and I keep feeding him when he shows up. Sometimes I wish he would just get worse all of a sudden, so I could get him off the street ... I do see him getting gradually worse, so it's only a matter of time."

Credit union

Continued from Page 4

golden anniversary at a dinner last Friday, they celebrated a tradition of remarkable dedication.

For most of its history, the credit union was operated solely by volunteers, who served on the board of directors, the supervisory committee, and the credit committee, which meets each week to evaluate loan applications. Only recently did the board's treasurer and two tellers begin receiving a small salary for staffing the office on Monday and Tuesday evenings.

The board's first president, William Schwab, served in that position for more than 40 years. Gross, the only charter member of the credit union who remains active, served as vice president for 40 years before taking on the president's job 10 years ago. "We never had a problem getting officers," he said.

What has occasionally threatened the Holy Family Credit Union is declining membership. Because shares may only be sold to parishioners and their families, the stability of the credit union is linked to the stability of the parish. In recent years, both have lost some long-time members as the surrounding neighborhood has become more transient.

Membership received a rare boost in 1974, when the state granted permission for parishioners from nearby Holy Apostles Church to join Holy Family Credit Union, after the two parishes merged their schools.

The school itself has provided a steady flow of new members since 1973, when board member Mary Schwartz helped establish a children's credit union program. Every Tuesday afternoon, 30 or more students from Holy Family School troop downstairs to make deposits. Altogether, the credit union counts more than 100 youths among its members.

Like other lending institutions, Holy Family's Credit Union has its share of problems

with loan repayment. As Frank Gross puts it, "Some people know where to get the money, but forget where to return it."

Board members try to respond quickly in a personal fashion when borrowers fall behind in their payments, he explained. They are also willing to help the borrowers renegotiate a debt if they have financial problems.

Although Holy Family Credit Union is church-related, the credit union is not church-run, McKechney said. Such an arrangement helps to prevent collection problems from becoming parish conflicts. "Even if you have a fight with Father, you still have to pay your loan payment," she said.

Close neighborhood and parish ties also contribute to a low percentage of delinquent accounts, McKechney added.

"In this area, this parish, there are so many family accounts," she said. "You've got to pay back your loan because you've got to live with these people."

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