York Rescue Mission adds mental health services

Matthew Carey's goal is to make sure people don't need to come back to him.

The CEO of the York Rescue Mission has worked over his first half-year in that position to bring in services to help his homeless clientele get some stability in their lives and offer them tools to thrive after they leave.

"So when they do leave us, they are better prepared to deal with what life brings them," he said.

The mission, at 367 W. Market St. in York City, just added a job-placement and life-skills component to the shelter, which will begin offering mental-health services in July, Carey said.

Carey said the Rescue Mission will have on-site counselors from Safe Harbor Christian Counseling two days a week starting the week of July 11. The offices will be in the mission-owned building right next door to the existing facility.

Carey said a high number of the people who stay in his shelter could be helped by the new services.

“Almost 80 percent of men and women that we serve identify as having some sort of mental- or behavioral-health problem,” he said.

And he predicts people will willingly take advantage of the mental-health services. Already, 75 percent of the mission's residents have signed up, Carey said.

**Medication:** He said the way the mental-health services work will be consistent with the mission's approach as a Christian organization. According to Carey, that means often trying to avoid prescribing medication.

“Our intent here is not to push medicine on them,” he said.

Of course, he said, that doesn't mean the staff will never prescribe medication — there will be plenty of times when some medicine can help people stabilize, Carey said. And the counselors do have the ability to prescribe drugs — they're fully licensed and board certified — but the guiding philosophy will be try other treatment routes first.

“It’s a balance,” Carey said.

And many of the people who sign up might just be looking for a professional to talk to, he said.

**Residence program:** The mission provides some “emergency shelter” services — housing people for a night or two when they find themselves on the streets — but the main focus of the mission is a longer-term residence program. Last week, 48 men, 27 women and eight children lived there under that program. Men average about eight to 10 months, while women often are there for less time, often just a couple of months, Carey said.

The mental-health services are for the people in the residence program.

**Health care:** Carey, who became CEO around the start of the year, announced physical-health services in the Rescue Mission at the end of March. Medical personnel from the Katallasso Family Health Center come in every Tuesday to assist the people in the mission’s residence program, and they’ve been busy each week.

Carey said it’s been a huge help, especially when the normal bouts of colds and strep throat have cut through the mission's residents. In the past, the only way for them to get treatment would have been to go to the emergency room or self-medicate with drugs or alcohol. But now the health facilities are what the residents turn to.

“It’s really making a cultural change inside of our ministry,” he said.

Carey said the program likely will expand in the future.

Training: A job-placement program just started up at the mission, Carey said. Right now, there are two people in it, working unpaid four-hour janitorial shifts at a local business. This is part of the holistic approach the mission takes with its residents, Carey said — give them the opportunity and skills to hold down a job.

His new food services director at the mission — which serves meals to the needy every day — also has experience training people to work in food services. He hopes to have her start training residents so they can get jobs in restaurants around the area.

"I'd eventually like to have a complete training kitchen," he said.

— Reach Sean Cotter at scotter@yorkdispatch.com or on Twitter at @SPCotterYD.