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Homeless shelter transformed into health center

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

Published: Thursday, December 15, 2011 at 5:17 p.m.

When local psychiatrist Michael Kozart first started seeing Jeremy Moore, 35, two months ago, their consultations were held in cramped quarters at the A Street Clinic in downtown Santa Rosa. Their trust and respect was firmly established there.

On Wednesday, Kozart and Moore, who is bipolar and manic-depressive, discussed ways of fine-tuning Moore's combination of medications. But this time, their meeting took place at the new Brookwood Health Center on Sonoma Avenue — in a much larger and respectful setting.

"A Street was so cramped and when they opened this place it was like wow," said Moore. "It's got new bathrooms."

The Brookwood Health Center opened late last month as a joint project of Santa Rosa Community Health Centers and Catholic Charities, with both organizations dividing floor space for separate programs.

The health center network operates medical services at the new facility, while Catholic Charities runs its newly expanded Project Nightingale, a program that provides 24-hour respite beds to homeless people who are discharged from a hospital but have nowhere to recover.

The new facility is located at the site of the former Brookwood Center Homeless Shelter, a 40-bed city shelter that was shuttered in 2009 for cost reasons. But it would not be the end of the story for the center.

The building was remodeled to convert offices into six medical exam rooms and turned the large open area in the center of the building into a waiting area, an activities room.

The clinical part of the facility was made possible through a \$650,000 annual federal grant to expand health care services for people who are homeless in Sonoma County, as well as a one-time \$300,000 grant from the Sonoma County Medical Services Program.

"The patients feel validated and that was one of my first impressions," said Kozart, who is the health center's medical director. "We've come up with a beautiful space, a beautiful clinic. There's a certain higher level of professionalism that comes with this setting."

Project Nightingale's respite beds, which went from five beds on Morgan Street in downtown Santa Rosa to 14 at the new facility, is located in a secure and private area of the building.



(Kent Porter / Press Democrat)
Psychiatrist Michael Kozart, left, chats with 35 year-old Jeremy Moore on Wednesday at the Brookwood Health Center.



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Nightingale patients are often visited by medical staff at the health center, which is currently open Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

"We've had Nightingale for 10 years, now we have all this," said Nick Baker, program director of Catholic Charities' Homeless Service Center.

The relocation of the Nightingale program was made possible with a seed grant of more than \$100,000 from Kaiser Permanente, as well as ongoing support from local hospital's including Kaiser, Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital and Sutter Medical Center.

Aside from the six exam rooms and respite beds, the center is equipped with a kitchen, laundry and supply room, lab room, utility rooms and two restrooms with bathing facilities. Staff with Sonoma County mental services and the Drug Abuse Alternatives Center, or DAAC, will also provide outpatient services at the center.

Moore, who currently participates in DAAC's Turning Point residential treatment program, said his condition has improved greatly under Kozart's care.

"My patience is getting slowly bigger," he said during his consultation with Kozart. "I tremble a little."

"That's one of the side effects," added Kozart.

"But I can deal with that," said Moore.

"One of the things we're trying to do is provide a medical home for people who maybe are frequently going to emergency rooms and are not needing to," said Lynea Seiberlich, the health center's site manager.

For local hospitals, the center offers somewhere to discharge homeless people who do not have a place to recover. That in turn reduces the likelihood that the patient will end up back in the emergency room.