

State care 'not where it should be'

Mental health director discusses Texas system

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- Advocate reporter Madeline Lewis talks to MHMR director Don Polzin

BY MADELINE LEWIS - MLEWIS@VICAD.COM

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The Gulf Bend's leading provider of mental health celebrates its new home today amid criticism of the care being delivered statewide.

Gulf Bend Mental Health and Mental Retardation Center will celebrate its move to Nursery Drive in Victoria on Tuesday with a grand opening ceremony. The event will feature speeches from state Rep. Geanie Morrison and state Sen. Glenn Hegar.

In an interview Monday, Gulf Bend's executive director, Don Polzin, reflected on the center and the state of mental health care in Texas.

"The mental health system is certainly not where it should be," he said. "That's a national problem, not just in the state of Texas."

His comments came in light of recent criticism of some of the public institutions for the mentally disabled in Texas. The Associated Press reported last week that it had uncovered evidence of severe mistreatment of some patients in these institutions, which are also known as state schools.

Gulf Bend is not one of the live-in state schools. It provides out-patient care and long-term residential care in community living arrangements to mentally disabled patients. However, all public mental health centers in Texas face similar challenges, including finding the right employees for the often-difficult work of caring for the mentally disabled, Polzin said.

"You have to recruit the best folks you can get," he said. "You have to recruit people who are committed, who have a desire to do this kind of work."

Part of the problem is many mental health facilities are inadequately funded and, consequently, cannot pay employees sufficient wages,

Polzin said.

"In a lot of these positions, there's probably a high degree of turnover," he said.

Gulf Bend tries to maintain a level of funding that allows it to attractively compensate its employees, Polzin said.

Though he saw faults in the state schools, Polzin said he thought it would be a mistake for Texas to close them. Without the institutions, many mentally disabled would have nowhere to go.

However, he added, not all the people in these institutions require in-patient care. Some would do well as patients in facilities like Gulf Bend.

"We try to enable, as much as we can, an individual to live in the community and achieve their potential," he said.

GULF BEND'S MISSION STATEMENT: "To improve the quality of life of persons and their families who are challenged with problems related to mental illness and mental retardation."

To learn more about the center, call (361) 575-0611.

Source: <http://gulfbend.org/>

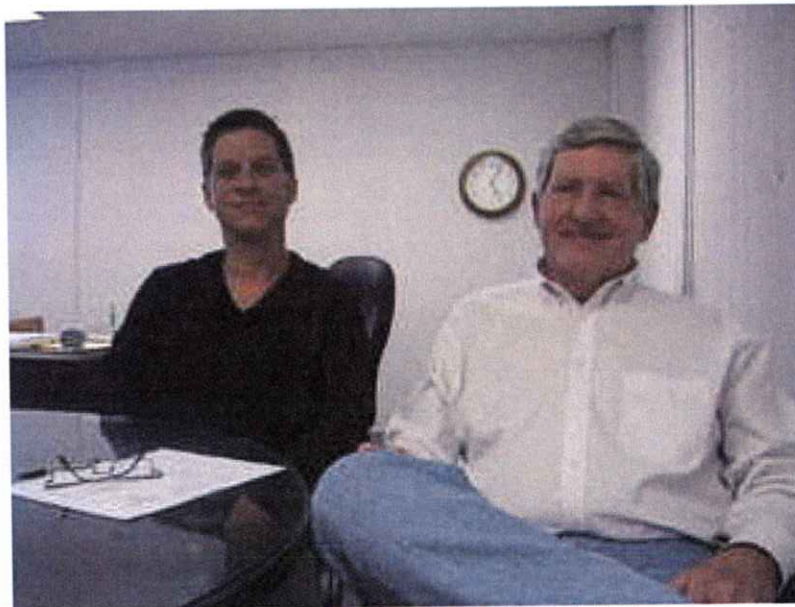


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