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Treatment center goes to county

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Allen County Community Corrections could start using a new mental health and substance abuse treatment center on Culbertson Street as early as January.

The Allen County commissioners on Friday formally took ownership of the building known as the Washington House Treatment Center.

County staff planned to change the locks and inventory the building Friday afternoon, Community Corrections Director Sheila Hudson said.

Community Corrections will use the facility to treat participants who are both mentally ill and substance abusers – a subgroup of offenders with high recidivism rates.

Hudson said she hopes that by providing those offenders treatment and helping them to get housing and continue to receive medication after they leave the program, they will be less likely to return to jail.

Commissioner Bill Brown said he was excited to begin the program, saying it will help reduce the county's crime rate and help people lead more productive lives.

"The more we can focus on that group and reduce their recidivism, the better off we are," Brown said.

Washington House closed in 2006 because of a lack of revenue.

Since then, the board has looked for another agency to take over, but several interested agencies lacked the resources to sustain the center.

The board offered the two-story residential clinic to the commissioners hoping the county would continue the organization's mission of helping substance abusers.

An estimated 20 percent of Community Corrections' participants are considered dual-diagnosis – mentally ill and substance abusers.

In January, Hudson plans to use the center to diagnose and determine whether offenders need the program. She will later offer outpatient treatment to offenders. By next summer, Hudson hopes to begin a residential treatment program, she said.

State Department of Correction funding will pay part of the project. Federal stimulus money funneled through the Indiana Criminal Justice Institute contributed \$640,518, she said.

Some of the state money will go toward about \$24,000 worth of repairs to security systems, the roof, and heating and air-conditioning systems, Hudson said.

The building has beds, linens, kitchen equipment and other supplies, said Alan Grinsfelder, a Washington House board member.

Hudson already has staff lined up to work at the building. And officials expect startup costs to total \$189,000.

Hudson plans to use a new community-based therapy in which those at the center will cook and clean together and maybe work in the vegetable garden across the street.

The emphasis is on giving participants skills they can use to stay out of jail, Grinsfelder said.

Hudson also hopes Washington House board members will continue their work by advising Community Corrections officials.

Community Corrections provides court-monitoring programs aimed at reducing the populations of state prisons and county jails. Participants might be on home detention or have returned from a prison sentence.

Through Community Corrections, participants have access to substance abuse treatment, education and job training.

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