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EDITORIALS

Welcome alternative

Allen County added to its exemplary record of launching progressive alternative sentence programs Tuesday when it opened Kelley House, a unique facility that will treat drug users with addiction and/or mental illness.

Allen County Community Corrections opened Kelley House in the former location of Washington House southwest of downtown, four years after that facility closed. The reopened facility is named to honor the late James Kelley, the businessman and auto dealer who was a major benefactor for Washington House, which came to be known as the treatment facility of last resort in Allen County.

Like Washington House, Kelley House will help people with addictions who often have no other place to turn. But Kelley House is a court-supervised program, treating drug offenders who have much less chance of rehabilitation in traditional jails.

Community Corrections, which supervises, among others, people on home detention and drug court, will operate the program. Like its other programs, Kelley House will operate on grants and user fees, not local property tax dollars. The opening coincides with Community Corrections' 25th anniversary.

Addressing the root issues behind participants' mental illnesses and drug use, the program teaches life skills, helping residents become self-sufficient, and reducing the chances they will need government programs in the future. And the agency wants early successful participants in the program to help their successors by designing activities and other programs.

Kelley House is the latest in the county's innovative use of alternative sentencing. Like drug court, Re-entry Court, home detention and work release, Kelley House helps relieve taxpayers of the burden of paying for overcrowded jails while providing more specific rehabilitation. This holds promise to reduce recidivism, resulting in additional savings. The need for such alternative sentencing will only increase, particularly as state officials seek ways to reduce prison overcrowding.

People who commit drug offenses will go somewhere, and jail often does little to help address the root causes for drug users who have become addicts or have mental illness. Kelley House offers much more hope, and the community will benefit each time it works.

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Kelley House, a residential treatment center for drug offenders with addiction and/or mental illness, opened Tuesday with a plan to reduce recidivism.