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COLORADOAN

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Wednesday, February 23, 2000

County shutting its youth treatment center

By DAVID PERSONS
The Coloradoan

Larimer County commissioners approved a plan Tuesday to close Youth Safe, a county-funded residential treatment center for troubled youths.

The closure becomes effective March 31.

About half of the 15 youths currently being treated at the facility will be relocated to private treatment centers in the area.

The remainder are scheduled to finish their treatment at the end of March

and will be released.

The county has operated the Youth Safe — formerly Shelter Care — program since fall 1990. However, Youth Safe officials have struggled since the outset to keep costs in line with the revenue they received. The county has spent \$888,000 over the past 10 years to subsidize deficits in the program.

While the deficit is a prime reason why Larimer County Human Services Director Ginny Riley recommended that the commis-

Financial woes add up to trouble for Youth Safe

sioners close the program, it was not the only reason.

"There's also been indirect costs to the program in addition to the deficit," Riley said. "In 1999, those costs were about \$80,000."

In addition, the program's 10-year lease to rent space at Foothills Gateway Inc., 301 Skyway Drive, expires at the end of the year. Youth Safe must sign a new 10-year lease with Foothills Gateway by June 30.

The new lease, however, will reflect the going rental rate, about \$12 to \$15 per square foot. Rent on the old lease was \$3.50 per square foot.

Two new residential treatment centers, with the capacity of nearly 30 beds, will open in the next couple of months, further increasing the community's ability to provide these services, Riley said. They will be operated by the Jacob Center and

Mountain Crest Hospital.

"All these things put together make it prudent to close Youth Safe," Riley told the commissioners.

Riley added that the impact on parents should not be significant.

"Medicaid pays for this service so there will be no (additional) cost to the families," Riley said of the closure.

As for the program's employees — 14 full-time

workers, nine temporaries, two contract mental health workers and four student interns — Riley said some planning were already under way to take care of them.

The manager of Youth Safe has already resigned to take a job managing one of the new centers, Riley said. Two other employees have found assignments within the department. Riley said this effort would continue so as many employees can be relocated as possible.

Because some employees

may wish to leave before the program ends, Riley suggested that if any employee is willing to work until the closing at the end of March, that the employee be given two weeks' severance pay as an incentive. The commissioners approved the suggestion.

Riley also suggested that the program staff be allowed to sell office equipment that isn't needed elsewhere in the county and keep the money to help defray close-out expenses. The commissioners agreed.