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‘This is so needed’: Children’s Advocacy Center opens new location in Orange



The Children’s Advocacy Center of Franklin County and North Quabbin STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

By Domenic Poli, Staff Writer

ORANGE — The Children’s Advocacy Center of Franklin County and North Quabbin area has opened a second office in the Health Center Plaza in Orange, with the plan to fully open by Jan. 1.

The current location on Wisdom Way in Greenfield morphed out of the Northwestern Children’s Advocacy Center (now the Children’s Advocacy Center of Hampshire County) in Northampton, and was a Northwestern District Attorney’s Office program when it opened its doors in 2016. The mission soon expanded to establishing a location in the North Quabbin region, where mental health resources are particularly lacking.

“It was really ... the DA’s desire to make sure that every child had access to this type of care, regardless of where they were,” said Dr. Jeffrey Trant, the center’s executive director, overseeing both sites. “And so we got started, really, with an idea and a ‘build it and they will come’ mentality.”



Children's Advocacy Center of Franklin County and North Quabbin CEO Jeff Trant and Clinical Director Beth Agostino-Evans in the new Orange office of the Children's Advocacy Center of Franklin County and North Quabbin on New Athol Road. STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

Trant said that traveling from Orange and the rest of the North Quabbin region — where most of the Franklin County CAC's clients live — proved challenging for families with children in need of a child advocacy center.

“A central tenet in victim services is that no person will ever pay a dollar to receive services,” Trant said. “We don't charge commercial insurances, because that means people have co-payments, that means they have deductibles.”

The executive director said the advocacy center got a \$86,900 grant from The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, which turned the concept into a reality. It also got financial assistance from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts, the Bete Family Foundation and Greenfield Cooperative Bank.

Trant said the agency understood an investment was necessary to build a successful and long-term relationship with the community and began to look for a space. The advocacy center has opened in the Health Center Plaza space formerly occupied by the Bear Arms gun shop, which is now in downtown Athol. The 801-square-foot Orange location at 119 New Athol Road, in the plaza owned by the Community Health Center of Franklin County, got its certificate of occupancy on Dec. 4 and saw its first patient Tuesday afternoon. The space consists of treatment spaces, a multi-purpose room and a bathroom.

“That's a win-win,” he said. “Literally, I couldn't have drawn a better situation if I could kind of create it from scratch.”



A therapy room at the Orange office of the Children’s Advocacy Center of Franklin County and North Quabbin on New Athol Road. STAFF PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

Trant explained that statewide, the average time between a child expressing a need for services and receiving them is 14 weeks. This figure is 26 weeks for Franklin County and more than a year for those in the North Quabbin region.

“I think a maxim that is very true is that the North Quabbin is the last to receive services and they’re the first to lose them — just in general,” he said.

Trant and clinical director Beth Agostino-Evans said North Quabbin residents are understandably skeptical of providers due to a history of making promises of longevity, only to abandon the area.

“This is so needed, so important,” said Agostino-Evans. “It took a good six months when I first started seeing kids and families down here for them to really believe that I was going to continue to come back. I mean, Jeff is correct, I got a lot of questions – ‘How long are you going to be here? Can we trust that you’re going to stay around?’

Trant said he also wanted a space near a grocery store so families could shop for food during a child’s appointment. That wish was granted, as a Hannaford Supermarket is across the street.

“I think we’ve built good rapport with the community, and it’s so needed,” she added. “So I’ve been truly excited about this.”

The space is not yet fully furnished but is expected to be soon. HAI Architecture, Inc. in Northampton designed the space and Thayer Street Builders in South Deerfield handled the construction work. The furniture was ordered from Andy’s & The Oak Shoppe in Greenfield and office interiors are coming from Conte Office Interiors in Greenfield.

“This, ultimately, is a bit of a pilot project for us,” he said. “We signed a five-year lease, with a five-year option to renew. So we’ll be here for, hopefully, a minimum of 10 years.”