

David Lawrence Center in East Naples introduces mental health program for kids

[Liz Freeman](#), liz.freeman@naplesnews.com; 239-263-4778

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(Photo: Dorothy Edwards/Naples Daily News)

In the mental health field, there is reason to celebrate when more treatment options become available.

That was the case Friday when the David Lawrence Center hosted a fair and ribbon-cutting ceremony to introduce a children's outpatient complex on its Golden Gate Parkway campus in East Naples, along with a new pharmacy and adult primary-care center.

Showcasing the new services to the public helps build familiarity with how help is available, and it brings awareness to mental health issues, which affect a wide swath of the community.

The children's outpatient complex is where a new "partial hospitalization" program is offered with a multidisciplinary team to help teens ages 13 to 17.

"I think this is a wonderful day for the community," Scott Burgess, president and chief executive of the David Lawrence Center, said to the more than 100 people who attended the event Friday.

Collier Commissioner Penny Taylor said the center is a vital part of the community, for both the young and old.

"It responds to a need and is intricately woven in our community," Taylor said.

The staff is excited to have the first partial hospitalization program in the region for children, Burgess said.

"This is yet another evidence-based practice that David Lawrence Center is providing to address serious mental health challenges for our children," he said.

"This short-term, yet intensive, day program will provide comprehensive clinical care and support to foster recovery, while allowing the children to be able to sleep in their own bed and be with their families in the evenings," Burgess said.

The program will run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. five days a week for teens who face anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder or other mental health problems as a primary diagnosis, said Natalie Garcia, director of admission and outpatient therapy services. There can be a secondary substance abuse disorder that needs addressing, she said.

Other mental health centers around the country have partial hospitalization programs, but the David Lawrence Center's program is a first for Southwest Florida.

The program involves individual and group therapy and medication management. It can be a step-down program from the crisis stabilization unit, Garcia said.

The teens do not attend school while in the program for one to three weeks, depending on their needs, but the center staff work with schools to keep the kids on track, she said.

“The goal is to reduce or eliminate any self-harming behavior and



Giovanni Rodriguez, 4, of Naples talks with Batman
(Photo: Dorothy Edwards/Naples Daily News)

improve their coping skills,” Garcia said. “We hope it is an intensive therapy program so they get back into school and are successful.”

The David Lawrence Center has been treating 2,500 children a year and outgrew its former space. It now will be able to serve 200 to 300 more clients, Garcia said.

“We continue to grow every year, and so does the community,” Garcia said.

The preconstruction-type building cost \$600,000. A matching grant of \$150,000 was given by the Richard M. Schulze Family Foundation.

Also new on the campus is a Genoa pharmacy to provide medications to clients. Genoa contracts with mental health centers around the country to be on site and can do medication compliance with patients, said Nancy Dauphinais, chief operating officer of the David Lawrence Center.

“They really get to know the patients,” she said.

Genoa has a pharmacy presence at 363 mental health centers around the country, which includes 17 in Florida, said Scott KrocZolowski, director of operations for Genoa.

The former children's center that was vacated when the new building became operational is now occupied by the Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida, a private, nonprofit medical organization that is offering adult primary care services on site three days a week.

The idea is that adults seeing counselors at David Lawrence who have a medical issue that needs attention can walk over and be seen. The concept of co-mingling behavioral health and medical services is more commonplace around the U.S. as a way to get people connected to help, reduce stigmas and address medical conditions in early stages.