



Youth treatment program, shelter closes

By GENE ZALESKI, T&D Staff Writer | Posted: Saturday, June 18, 2011 8:15 am

An Orangeburg community-based treatment home and shelter for troubled boys and girls has closed its doors.

Orangeburg Attention Homes Inc. discontinued its services because of a decline in clientele and budget cutbacks, OAH Chairman William Hamilton said.

The program relied on a per diem, per child payment from the S.C. Department of Social Services and the S.C. Department of Juvenile Justice. But with the reduction in clientele, the money diminished.

"If you don't have the students in your home, you don't get the per diem from the state," Hamilton said. "It kept declining and declining, and we kept losing ground on our financial stability."

He said increasing competition was also a factor in the program's demise.

"Our staff were trained for moderate management," Hamilton said, noting the clientele were generally children with some troubles but without any criminal background. "The placement homes now are the boot camp-style homes, and their staff is trained for high management. They deal with kids with more problems and some with more of a criminal background."

As a result of the lack of funds, the organization stopped accepting placements in September 2010, although it is still licensed, he said.

Hamilton said the OAH is in the process of closing, with all the needed paperwork being completed on the liquidation of assets and payment of creditors.

Currently, the properties are up for sale, with the proceeds expected to help pay off any outstanding debts accrued by the organization, he said. The buildings could serve as either office space or for residential purposes, Hamilton said.

"They both have a lien on them by the bank, but we hope we can sell them for enough to satisfy the liens as well as pay other creditors," he said.

OAH had both a boys' and girls' home.

The boys' home was located at 174 Centre St., and the girls home was at 461 Rembert St. near the old Orangeburg hospital.

OAH was founded in 1968 with the assistance of the Junior Service League. Hamilton said when the program started, it was an emergency placement shelter for truant girls but over the years, the program evolved to include boys.

The youths were placed by DJJ and DSS, and at its busiest time in the mid-1980s, the organization employed about 16. It dwindled to a staff of two over the last three years.

The organization housed a maximum of 12 boys and eight girls, and there was even a waiting list, Hamilton said.

"A few years ago, we were at capacity," said Hamilton, who has been affiliated with the OAH since 1979. "The homes have really been a part of this community, and they certainly have done a lot of good."

In addition to receiving funding from DSS and DJJ, the center received about \$3,700 a quarter, or \$15,000 a year, from Orangeburg County. The last funding request made by OAH to the county was in June 2010.

"When their (agency) budgets went down, we were not placing as many kids," Hamilton said. "We were hurt as much as anybody else. We could barely make payroll."

Seeing the program die is sad for him, Hamilton said.

"I thought that our program, the model we used, was effective in getting kids back in (their) home," he said. "The model we started out with was BIBH - Bring It Back Home.

"Our goal was to take these kids who were having problems with family and coping in school and bring them to our teacher model. We taught them coping skills to change their attitude and put them back in their home."

Contact the writer: gzaleski@timesanddemocrat.com or 803-533-5551.