

Plans Finalized for Vera French Outreach Center

With your support, we can make this goal a reality!

The new Vera French Outreach Center will house the Frontier Community Support Program and serve as base of operations for other community-based programs.

With creation of a new facility in Davenport, services for local adults with mental illness will be strengthened. Conceived in part as a new home for Frontier Community Support Program, the Vera French Outreach Center offers exciting new opportunities. "We're finally going to be able to give people what they deserve," says Anne Armknecht, Chief Executive Officer, Vera French Community Mental Health Center. "Dignity and respect, safety and security. As they tackle independent living, this new facility will help them improve their quality of life tremendously."

In a convenient, central location, the new facility is a response to changing needs. When the Frontier program was established in downtown Davenport in 1986, many of its clients lived nearby. But recent downtown revitalization efforts have driven out low-income residents, making it harder for clients to get to the Frontier center.

Compounding that problem is Frontier's downtown facility itself. The 20,000-square foot building is costly and inefficient to operate. The absence of handicapped accessibility also poses a significant problem, as do mounting public safety concerns, including vandalism and theft.

The new outreach center (its location will be revealed when the transaction is finalized) contains 5,000 square feet of usable space. The smaller size is a better fit for the Frontier program, which offers a supportive learning environment: problem solving skills, coping strategies, daily living, health and wellness activities, crisis intervention, medication management, laundry facilities and two light meals daily Monday through Friday.



Work will begin later this summer on the new Vera French Outreach Center. Remodeling expenses will be funded by donor support: Please contact us to see how you can be a part of this!

Extensive remodeling is planned, including a new kitchen, dining area, group rooms, therapy rooms and nursing office. Estes Construction, Davenport, is general contractor; Conceptual Designs, Bettendorf, provided design services at a 50 percent discount.

A \$250,000 budget will fund remodeling costs, all of which will be financed through Vera French Foundation donor support. "We've already been awarded grants from The Hubbell-Waterman Foundation and Riverboat Development Authority to finance kitchen equipment and technology purchases, and we will apply for more grants – but we really need the community's help to underwrite this project."

Work is expected to be underway by late summer; the new facility should be ready for occupancy in November. Planners believe the outreach center will see rapid growth in its client base. "With a good location and full accessibility, we'll serve more people," Anne says. "If you build it, they will come. Community-based services prevent unnecessary hospitalization, incarcerations and homelessness, and that's a plus for everyone." With your support, we can make this happen! ■



You Made it Happen: Memories of Marshmallows

For most, it is their first solo journey away from home. Pangs of homesickness are offset by sudden new adventures. The drama of a campfire on a summer night. The delicacy of a charred marshmallow. The agony and ecstasy of tetherball championships. Weaving a lanyard; catching a fish; swimming through endless afternoons. Learning to paddle a canoe in tandem with a buddy; cooking a hotdog. The joys of summer camp are as fleeting as fireworks on a night sky but as enduring as memory. This summer, thanks to donors like you, 36 local kids will revel in their own summer camp adventures and build memories for a lifetime. Without you and your support of the Vera French Camp Scholarship program, it wouldn't happen! ■

Thanks to Donors Like You, School-Based Services Helps Kids Learn

Chloe and Carmen start the school year off-track, out of synch with their peers. Hungry for attention, boisterous, full of opinions and drama, the girls are an uncommonly disruptive duo. By year's end, thanks to your support of School-Based Services, the girls are thriving and learning.

"At the beginning of the school year, they were almost butting heads," their teacher recalls. "The girls couldn't really contribute to class activities, neither of them had any social connections with others in the class, and it got to the point where their struggles impacted the other kids."

When kids come to school with baggage from home, it impacts instruction. "They're not ready to learn," their teacher says. "It's very important to get them help early. They really need the stability that comes with routine and consistency."

A unique form of therapy provided through Vera French School-Based Services helped Chloe and Carmen (not their real names) learn to face challenges in a constructive, positive manner. The elementary school team – teacher, therapist, counselor and principal – worked together

to craft a response. After securing permission from the girls' parents, the Vera French SBS therapist designed a uniquely customized approach: shared sessions of play therapy twice a week.

The girls relished the personalized attention. Afterward, they were allowed to "debrief" before resuming classroom activities. "They'd write in their journals or draw," their teacher says. "That helped them get ready to learn." Meanwhile their therapist kept the parents informed and offered suggestions for the girls' teacher to use in the classroom.

The combination of a collaborative approach and carefully tailored therapy has turned things around for Chloe and Carmen. "I can see them applying strategies they've learned," their teacher says. "Now they have a sense of accountability to each other. They've definitely gained a mutual respect and appreciation for each other."

One year later, Chloe and Carmen enter the third grade ready to learn. They're social, happy, engaged. Ongoing therapy provided by Vera French picks up where it left off in May. Two young lives are back on track, thanks to your support of School-Based Services. Thanks to donors like you, Chloe and Carmen face a brighter tomorrow. ■

Early Treatment Crucial for Children with Autism

Children are profoundly impacted by autism. But with early treatment, positive outcomes are possible. That message was delivered by Temple Grandin, a professor of animal science at Colorado State University and keynote speaker at the Vera French Foundation's Speakers Series in April.

Diagnosed with autism in 1950, Grandin is a noted lecturer, best-selling author and autism advocate. "Her achievements are proof that you can live with autism and have a semi-normal life," says Dr. Ghada Hamden-Allen, child psychiatrist at Vera French Community Mental Health Center. "She gives hope to a lot of people."

Incidence of autism, a developmental disorder appearing in the first three years of life, is increasing. Early treatment is crucial. "The earlier autism is recognized and the sooner children receive occupational and speech therapy, the better the outcome," Dr. Hamden-Allen says.

Without proper treatment, those with autism face steep odds. "The kids who have a lower IQ, who get less education and no treatment are more likely to have trouble communicating," Dr. Hamden-Allen says. "They're more likely to exhibit behavioral problems and have trouble finding work as young adults."

Autism can be identified in children as young as two months. Parents should learn how to recognize signs of the disorder (www.cdc.gov or www.autism-society.org are good sources of information) or consult a pediatrician.

And parents of autistic children must be tenacious advocates. "I tell them to never give up," Dr. Hamden-Allen says. "They must educate themselves and do everything they can to provide services for their child. Keep in mind that autism is a spectrum: You must keep trying." ■

Prize Winners Named

iPads were awarded as part of the Vera French Foundation's Speakers Series in April. Winners were Jonathan Burbridge (left) and Tyler McDaniel. Two iPads were generously donated by The Quad City Times and American TV & Appliance. ■



Battling the Stigma

"It is an odd paradox that a society, which can now speak openly and unabashedly about topics that were once unspeakable, still remains largely silent when it comes to mental illness."

– Glenn Close, www.bringchange2mind.org

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