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The Laconia Daily Sun

New Belmont facility provides transitional home-like setting for patients with brain injuries

By Adam Drapcho
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BELMONT — The building at 87 Horne Road was originally built as a private residence. Since then it has served as a private Christian school and an assisted living facility for the elderly. Since January, the house-like building on 17 rural acres has found a new purpose as a place for people with brain injuries to stay and receive treatment and therapy.

Lakeview at the Meadows is a facility operated by Lakeview Management, LLC, which has several locations in New Hampshire as well as sites in Wisconsin and Pennsylvania. Each of their facilities has its own niche, said Andrea Aldrovandi, administrator of the Belmont site.

Her facility fills a gap between other Lakeview sites. A patient who suffers a brain injury typically starts at a hospital to address other physical ailments. Once ready to be discharged from the hospital, the patient would be transferred to a a rehabilitation center, such as Lakeview Neurorehab in Effingham. That facility is staffed and equipped to assist patients with great challenges, including aggressive or anti-social behavior.

Lakeview at the Meadows was designed for patients who don't need to live in a secure facility and would benefit from a home-like atmosphere, yet the symptoms of their brain injury prevent them from being able to transition to a group home or family residence. Aldrovandi said the Belmont facility is a "residential treatment facility" which offers a medical model of care and around-the-clock nursing care within a homey environment.

"We are our own little entity," said Aldrovandi. "This is the first time that Lakeview has done this."

The facility took in its first clients in early January. There were three residents there as of last week. Lakeview at the Meadows is licensed to house up to 16 people, mostly in sunny, private rooms.

Resident clients will all be 18 years old or older and have acquired some sort of brain injury. "Everybody's brain injury is different," said Aldrovandi. Many brain injuries occur as a result of motor vehicle accidents or other physical trauma. Some can be chemically-induced while others can be caused by disease. Though every client comes with his or her own back story, Aldrovandi and her staff have the same goal, "To get them in the least restrictive setting possible."

Nurses and community integration specialists work with the clients to find strategies that will empower them to return to a life of some independence. First, though, clients will find ways to prepare their own meals, manage their medications, perhaps hold employment and build other skills necessary.

Aldrovandi estimated that some patients will be able to accomplish those tasks within a few months, while others might stay for decades. "There is no time limit," she said.

Because some might be staying for many years, she was pleased at the characteristics of the building and the setting. Lots of windows let in an abundance of natural light. Those windows also give residents a close-up view of passing deer and turkeys. Snowshoe hikes give residents fresh air this winter and a garden is planned once the frost breaks. "It is a very happy place," said Aldrovandi. "This wouldn't be a bad place to live."

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The setting is welcoming, and so has been the town, said Aldrovandi. Town officials were a "huge help" in getting the permits and other legalities straightened out. The fire and police chiefs have been eager partners in planning for contingencies and police officers have made it a point to stop by for a game of cards so that they could acquaint themselves with the residents.

Working with her clients can at times be heart-wrenching, Aldrovandi said. Before their accident, they enjoyed lives that revolved around spouses, children and careers. Then, sometimes in an instant, that life was stolen from them. "They didn't do anything wrong," she said. "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

The work can be just as rewarding, though. She has seen, through therapy and treatment, clients make profound improvements. She likened the challenge to trying to solve a puzzle, where each patient requires a unique solution. "You try to find the piece that's going to help that client... The brain is an amazing organ. You just never stop trying."

CAPTION for LAKEVIEW in AA:

Clients and staff at Lakeview at the Meadows work on a crossword puzzle. Left to right, Nikki Bossie, Joanne Sanschagrín, Sandra Knipping, Andrea Aldrovandi, John M. Salonich II, Tanya Sennett and Richard Soucy. (Laconia Daily Sun photo/Adam Drapcho)