

Interlude in Danbury closes one program to expand another

By Nanci G Hutson, Staff Writer

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Courtesy of Interlude, Interlude Executive Director Kathleen Deschenes Photo: File

DANBURY -- An Interlude outreach program that for more than 25 years helped mentally ill adults live independently in the Danbury/New Milford area has closed.

The nonprofit agency will discontinue its community-based case management program, lay off two case managers and close its office on Main Street in New Milford.

It will reallocate the money it spent on the outreach program to expand its intensive residential care for adults with chronic mental illness and, in some cases, drug addictions.

Catholic [Family Services](#) in Danbury and the [Western Connecticut Mental Health Network](#) will take over most of Interlude's 15 remaining clients, seven of whom live in New Milford.

"We are mourning a loss of this program, but we are also looking toward the future," said Interlude Executive Director [Kathleen Deschenes](#).

She said the decision was fueled by a local needs assessment done in June. It showed plentiful case management services, but limited intensive residential facilities for those with mental illness and addictions.

State funding for the coming year is also aimed at the agency's residential services, she said. This year's program budget was \$440,000. Interlude's total budget is \$1.4 million.

With the change, Interlude will expand its residential program from 10 to 16 clients, and the intensive recovery program for those with mental illness and drug problems from seven to 10 clients, Deschenes said.

In addition, Deschenes said the agency is working with New Milford social service and housing leaders to open permanent, supportive housing for 10 to 12 homeless adults and five or six homeless families. Interlude would provide on-site support services at a cost of about \$135,000 annually.

"As we close one program, we are already in the midst of developing something new," Deschenes said. "We looked at every possible scenario before this decision was made. It's the hardest thing I've had to do since I came here (11 years ago)."

Client David Mayers, 66, said he thinks it's a shame Interlude will no longer offer this service in New Milford because it has helped him and others with psychiatric illnesses be able to live in the community.

"Interlude has been a family to many of these clients, and that's the loss," said [Rachel Bond Torpey](#), Interlude's part-time director of program development.

Mayers said he counts himself lucky his transition plan calls for him to work with Torpey, who also runs an independent support services business. He said he met her when he first joined the Interlude program 23 years ago.

"I trust them," Mayers said of the agency staff.

Interlude has a long-standing reputation with clients, and the closing is likely to be unsettling, said Dr. [Lisa Diamond](#), [New Milford Hospital](#)'s director of psychiatry. Interlude's leaders, though, have "thoughtfully, and carefully" unfurled this plan over the last four months so clients could transition to new case management services.

"In these tough economic times, Interlude has done an exceptional job looking at itself as an organization and thinking strategically about how to use their dollars most effectively," said [Michael Johnston](#), United Way of Western Connecticut president.

Looking at a picture of Interlude founder [Celine Karraker](#) on the wall of the Danbury office, Deschenes said she and her staff are committed to keeping her vision alive. Karraker founded Interlude in 1978.

"We want to make an impact where the community needs us," Deschenes said.

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