

Bridgewell sets sights on veterans, autism services

Originally Published on Tuesday, December 27, 2011

By Thor Jourgensen / The Daily Item

SAUGUS - It serves 3,000, mostly older adults, but development disability provider Bridgewell could count autistic adults and veterans with brain injuries among its clients over the next several years, Chief Operating Officer Kelly Johnson said this week.

Johnson said children and teenagers diagnosed as autistic may need the types of residential and disability programs Bridgewell provides after they age into adulthood. She said the Lynnfield-based agency wants to find ways to help veterans with brain injuries returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

"We're very committed to making this happen," she said.

She added that the city of Lowell reached out to Bridgewell to help develop housing for veterans.

Bridgewell is building three new homes for its clients through August 2012 to replace older residences.

Joel Karakaedos, Program Director of the Stocker Street House in Saugus, shows off one of the new tubs at the home. (Item Photo / Owen O'Rourke)

"Between now and August 2012, we will build three new homes to place people out of nursing homes," Johnson said.



Founded in 1958 by a couple committed to providing mental health care to Lynn school students, Bridgewell receives mostly state tax dollars to operate 80 programs and residences in 19 communities, including Lynn and Saugus.

One of its newest homes is 14 Stocker St., Saugus overlooking the Saugus River. Five developmentally disabled adults live in the house with its extra-wide doors and spacious bathrooms designed to accommodate wheelchairs.

Resident Harry Hriczov is 89 years old and began receiving help from Bridgewell - formerly known as Greater Lynn Mental Health - 30 years ago after living with his brother in West Lynn.

Johnson said many of Bridgewell's clients are older adults who lived with relatives until they were unable to care for them or who were institutionalized as children when developmental disability care involved sending people to state hospitals.

"They were pretty much abandoned. That is very much in contrast to younger people we are involved with now who have families very involved in their care," she said.

Resident Donald Jordan and Hriczov use wheelchairs and the Stocker Street home is outfitted with bedroom doors built with push bars to provide quick exits during a fire. One of the bathtubs has a water-tight door that can be opened to push a rubber-coated wheelchair into the tub so that the resident does not risk injury while bathing.