

## NEWS

# Fairfield County ADAMH breaks ground on STARLight Center

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LANCASTER — The STARLight Center — a first of its kind in Fairfield County — is being built to serve as a short-term care facility for individuals struggling with mental health issues and substance abuse.

Elected officials, law enforcement and mental health and substance abuse professionals attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the Fairfield County Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board's, or ADAMH's, STARLight Center on Thursday.

The center, which will be located at 336 E. Locust St., will house up to eight mental health patients and 12 substance abuse patients at a time.

The facility's construction was made possible by the passing of a 2019 levy which provides nearly \$4 million more per year than what was collected before the levy, Marcy Fields, Executive Director of Fairfield County ADAMH, said. The levy money will be used to fund the facility's future operation costs as well as other mental health and substance abuse services in Fairfield County.

The center will be two stories, with one floor dedicated to mental health patients and the other to substance abuse patients. The mental health floor will be operated by New Horizons Mental Health Services, a mental health crisis prevention provider, and the substance abuse floor will be managed by Ohio Guidestone, a statewide mental health and substance abuse service provider.

Despite the difference in care space between the two services, Fields said the allowed number of patients in need of mental health care would increase if needed due to the facility's size.

“Each agency thought about what would be the best number to start with that we feel confident we could staff for, have the capacity to address ... and give us a chance to get a feel for truly how much demand there will be,” Fields said.

STARLight Center will be the only in-patient provider of psychiatric services for people who need support with mental health emergencies.

Fairfield Medical Center once had in-patient psychiatric care, but shifted its focus on assessing, prescribing medication and counseling mental health patients, following its conversion as an outpatient psychiatric care provider, according to a previous Eagle-Gazette report.

Although FMC is still available as a resource for mental health patients, the STARLight Center will now be able to alleviate the number of patients who check into the emergency room for mental health issues, Fields said.

“This will give another option for people that want to go talk to somebody about what they're dealing with but maybe don't feel like they need the whole emergency room,” Fields said. “(FMC) can address the people that need that level of care, and we can hopefully try to divert people to the STARLight Center who can manage with the level of care that will be offered there.”

No longer needing to leave the county for in-patient treatment, patients at the STARLight Center will be able to remain close to home while receiving the care they need. The care timeline for both mental health and substance abuse patients is expected to be relatively short—a three to five day stay—but substance abuse patients will be able to stay up to 30 days.

The facility will create between 25 to 35 new jobs in areas of entry-level positions to nurse practitioners, Fields said. The facility will also be hiring peer supporters, who are people who have gone through similar challenges and can relate to patients who are in the middle of confronting mental health and substance abuse issues of their own.

Fairfield County Sheriff Alex Lape and Lancaster Chief of Police Nick Snyder both said the STARLight Center will help their respective law enforcement agencies better serve the community in situations of mental health and substance abuse crises.

“We're neither fully equipped nor fully trained to handle a lot of the issues that the STARLight Center is going to take care of for us,” Snyder said. “While I believe Sheriff Lape and I have the best law enforcement officers in the country working for us, this is just an added benefit to have nurse practitioners, counselors (and) clinician all available in one place.”

Megan Golden, Chief Communications Officer for New Horizons Mental Health Services, said the STARLight Center's construction has been long-awaited and the agency is excited to help those in need of mental health services.

"This is going to be able to catch so many individuals that fall through the gaps within our systems and give them hope and hopefully improve their lives," Golden said.

The message ADAMH would like to extend to the community is demonstrated in the STARLight Center's logo — the tip of a star creating a ripple — which symbolizes the impact the facility will have on the community and individuals who seek its help.

"One small kind or healing act is what starts that ripple going and can make a huge impact on somebody's life," Fields said. "We also think that this center is going to ripple out into our community and have a really positive impact."