

# High Plains Mental Health asks county to maintain budget level

By Tom Betz  
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 Representatives from High Plains Mental Health asked Sherman County commissioners Tuesday to keep the county's donation at \$35,000 this year, the same as last year.

Karen Schuler, manager of preventive education and outreach, and Ken Loos, preventive education and outreach consultant, both from the main office in Hays, and Tracy Hillmer, Goodland office manager, reviewed patient activity over the year.

Schuler said the 20-county group hoped commissioners would maintain the county budget at \$35,000. While it did not get any increase from the state this year, she said, the organization held its own. Schuler said organizational changes at the state level in the Social and Rehabilitative Services system are putting a strain on the process and the changes are filtering down to the

nonprofit organizations like High Plains Mental Health.

She said the group's board reminded a few of the counties they need to increase their contribution, and some counties have realized they have not been helping as much as they need to, but Sherman County's level is fine when compared to what is spent for these programs.

Patient numbers for the past year were down a little here, she said, but part of that may be due to changes in the program. She said while the numbers are down, people are being served for longer periods of time, and that has pushed the costs up.

Looking at the 261 people served in Sherman County, Schuler said, the 25-59 age group has shown an increase to about 140 people, or 54 percent of all those served. She said about 25 percent were under 18.

In comparison to others in the 20-county area, she said, the Thomas County office served 303 people, Norton 257, Phillips 365, Rooks

230, Russell 352 and Ellis 1,564. Most of the other counties averaged fewer than 100 people, with Wallace, the smallest, lowest at just 29.

Schuler said the regional group provided prevention, education and outreach services throughout the year, with several programs presented in Goodland.

Commissioner Mitch Tiede asked Hillmer how things are going in the Goodland office. She said she was having some staffing issues. One person is leaving, but she planned to interview someone on Wednesday.

Schuler said they struggle to get staff in Goodland, Colby and Norton and even have problems getting people to come to Hays.

"We try to grow our own," she

said. "Sometimes it works and sometimes not."

Hillmer added that if they are short a person, the main office will find someone to help. She said some staff members come to the Goodland and Colby offices regularly.

Schuler said the travel costs are affecting everyone.

"We have a lot of traveling to do," she said, "and we are not sure what we can do, but we are looking at some options."

She said Meripat Bowman, a Sherman County representative on the group's board, was unable to be at the meeting, but has been a good representative, makes most of the meetings and has been working with the educational programs.

## Goodland Rotary sponsors emergency shelter box for disaster victims

Emergency relief has been slow getting to Myanmar after the devastating hurricane May 3, but one of the first groups allowed in was a flight of ShelterBoxes, many sponsored by Rotary clubs, including the one in Goodland.

The boxes are part of a global Rotary International project, and the Goodland club sent \$1,000 to sponsor a box this spring, a few weeks before the cyclone and the earthquakes in China.

The ShelterBox effort started in England in 2001, and has become a worldwide Rotary project with more than 500,000 people helped in 40 countries around the world.

A second flight of 1,000 boxes arrived in Myanmar on May 15, and teams on the ground helped load them onto trucks for the cyclone disaster area.

Shortly after the storm hit Myanmar, the first of two earthquakes hit China, and 800 shelter boxes arrived in that country on

May 27 to help victims in Sichuan Province.

Goodland Rotary President Richard Liess said the boxes are packed in a green plastic tub with a 10-person tent and necessities to help a family survive for six months.

Other items include insulated sleeping mats and bags (depending on the climate), thermal blankets, water-purification tablets, water containers or carriers, a trenching shovel, rope, a hatchet, a jack knife, a screwdriver, a hammer, a multi-fueled cook stove, eating utensils and plates and a children's activity kit. The plastic box is designed to be recycled.

ShelterBox was set up by the Rotary Club of Helston-Lizard, England, and is based in Cornwall. The charity is supported by international affiliates set up by Rotary clubs in other countries, including Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, New Zealand and the U.S.

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