



Louisiana Methodist Children's Home
904 DeVillie Lane
Ruston, LA 71270-6313
Phone: (318) 255-5020 Fax: (318) 255-6623

Friday, August 3, 2012

Dear Friend of Methodist Home for Children of Greater New Orleans,

You may have heard Louisiana's Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH) is closing Southeast Louisiana Hospital (SELH) in Mandeville. This closure is one part of DHH's effort to address a looming \$859 million loss of federal Medicaid funds.

As CEO of Louisiana United Methodist Children and Family Services, I want to share my perspective on how the closure of SELH will impact Methodist Home for Children of Greater New Orleans and our ability to care for children in the greater New Orleans area. There was a recent article in the *St. Tammany News* which reported, "Methodist Home for Children will lose 20 beds."

Rather than "lose 20 beds", I suggest a more complete statement is, "Methodist Home for Children will lose 20 beds on the grounds of Southeast Louisiana Hospital and is actively searching for a new place to call Home."

It is true our lease with the Department of Health and Hospitals will be terminated early by DHH's closure of SELH. We must relocate by June 30, 2013. However, we were told the hospital's dietary services will close in March of 2013.

Methodist Home for Children cares for youth who cannot live at home because of physical or sexual abuse which was severe enough that a judge removed them from the care of their parents. Nor can they live in foster care. It has been tried and failed. Many of our kids have experienced multiple foster home failures.

Our children are not going to disappear because SELH closes. The New Orleans region is Louisiana's most populous – yet it has the fewest number of alternatives per capita for children with significant emotional and behavioral needs who cannot live at home because of abuse or neglect. We are committed to remaining in the region.

In spite of the closure of Southeast Louisiana Hospital, we are working to find a way to continue providing residential care in the Greater New Orleans region for Louisiana's abused and neglected children with significant behavioral and emotional needs. This is what we do. This is what we have done for 110 years in Louisiana. It is what we will continue doing in the Greater New Orleans area.

We need another place to call "Home". In a nutshell, on a single property, we require 16-20 single bedrooms, 3 classrooms, a dietary area, and offices for staff. These new facilities must meet the licensing requirements of either the Department of Children and Family Services or the Department of Health and Hospitals.

Let me share some history. Prior to hurricane Katrina, Methodist Home for Children of New Orleans was a separate, sister agency of Louisiana Methodist Children's Home. The children and staff of Methodist Home for Children of New Orleans evacuated their facilities on Washington Street before Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans. They fled to Louisiana Methodist Children's Home's campus in Ruston where they remained for six months before returning to New Orleans.

Just as trauma pushes individuals to change, the consequences of Katrina brought significant change for Methodist Home for Children of New Orleans. Following Katrina, the New Orleans agency became part of the larger Louisiana United Methodist Children and Family Services. We were very fortunate to find open arms in Mandeville, on the campus of Southeast Louisiana Hospital where we have leased space. We are now in the fourth year of a ten year lease.

Of course, our lease of facilities from Louisiana's Department of Health and Hospitals was a temporary response to Katrina and its aftermath. We quickly began a search for 40 to 80 acres on which to build our own permanent facilities in the Greater New Orleans area. At first, we imagined we would build a facility similar to Methodist Children's Home of Southwest Louisiana which we opened last year in Sulphur. However, those notions were interrupted by changes coming out of Baton Rouge a couple of years ago.

Louisiana's implantation of a Coordinated System of Care (CSoC) put our development and construction plans for the greater New Orleans region on hold until more information is available. The significant changes the Coordinated System of Care brings to the child welfare system in Louisiana make it impossible to know answers to simple questions about what type of facilities will be required, where new facilities can be located, what types of residential services will be needed or even how many beds will be required or permitted.

Our lease of SELH facilities offered an interim opportunity to provide care while we wait and see how the changes wrought by the Coordinated System of Care will impact what we do for children and where we will be allowed to do it. Medicaid funding of CSoC and the increased regulatory structures those Medicaid funds bring to Louisiana's child welfare system significantly limit what a residential provider like Methodist Home for Children is permitted to do with facilities and programs.

So, while it is still too early to make permanent decisions about what types of residential care we will offer in the Greater New Orleans area, please know this: Methodist Home for Children of Greater New Orleans is committed to providing care for abused and neglected children.

We need to secure a new place to call Home within the next six months.

I end with this: our 48 staff members in Mandeville are awesome. Their attitudes are positive and their determination to make good things happen for children is strong. This turn of events has not shaken them. Marlin Giacona is a strong leader and has built a solid team who provide exceptional care to children. They are resilient and resourceful!

With gratitude for your support,



Rick Wheat
President/CEO
Louisiana United Methodist Children and Family Services