



Medina County Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Board Director Phillip Titterington, left, speaks at the Me...

## Human services levy dollars doing good in community



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MEDINA — Funds from the county's first human services levy have already started helping citizens across Medina County.

Issue 11 passed on Nov. 5 and the 1-mill levy will generate about \$5 million annually for the next five years.

The executive directors of the three agencies that will benefit from the levy spoke Tuesday at the Medina County commissioners meeting.

"Through the ADAMH Board, we've already started leveraging these dollars," Medina County ADAMH Board Director Phillip Titterington said.

He said he has a staff of four people, which is largely overworked. In the four years he's been director, the board has gone from 10 agencies that provide services to more than 30.

Titterington said there is a major need for crisis services. Alternative Paths has created a position as an access and engagement liaison.

"What that person is going to do is screen, triage and get the person where they need to go as soon as possible," he said.

He said he's focusing on child-oriented initiatives.

Titterington said he just got off a state conference call, which was focused on children and families during the holidays.

"Hopefully, we all have a great holiday season, but keep in mind, this is a very stressful time for a lot of people," he said.

The Medina County Office for Older Adults will get \$1 million annually, with the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Board getting \$1.5 million and Job and Family Services receiving a \$2.5 million share.

The levy was sought largely because the needs for human services are soaring, yet funding kept dwindling. The three agencies joined forces for a combined property tax levy.

"We really are interconnected," Office for Older Adults Executive Director Laura Toth said.

"We all have a vision to help the people in Medina County who are in need. It will continue to be a positive experience as we move through this levy."

Toth said her budget was \$664,000 when she started in 2014. It has grown to \$859,000 in 2019, an increase of about 5 percent each year.

She said she will have a strategic planning session Jan. 15 with her staff, board and county administration.

"We're going to flush this out and see what we can do and what we can't do," Toth said. "There are a lot of demands within the county."

The biggest piece of the pie with levy dollars is programming and services.

"That's all the things we're doing now at the Office for Older Adults, (such as) the home-delivered meals, the congregate meals and the transit program," Toth said.

"The money coming in through the levy isn't going to change from that initial amount. We have to figure out what we need to do to continue to provide the exact services we provide today. To me, that's No. 1. We never want to be in a position to cut services."

She said she would like to institute a two- to four-week meal program for seniors getting out of the hospital.

"It has shown that it will lower re-admittance rates," Toth said.

Also, she'd like to build on her volunteer program with a homemaker service where people come into homes and help seniors with non-medical support in the home. They would help people clean and get rides to doctor appointments.

"A coordinator would be someone we need to add," she said.

The Human Services Building at 246 Northland Drive was built in 1982 and needs some work, even though Toth said it has "good bones."

There has been some talk about Adult Protective Services being under the auspices of the Office for Older Adults, as it was in the past, instead of Job and Family Services.

"We continue to get calls for each other," Toth said.

Jeff Felton, executive director of Job and Family Services, is keeping a close eye on the SNAP program and rule changes on the national level that will trickle down locally. Able-bodied individuals have to work at least 20 hours a week to get SNAP benefits.

What might happen is that people with a house or car might not qualify for benefits with those assets. He's afraid some seniors would not qualify for SNAP if they own their home or car.

Felton said he'd use some of the levy money to hire staffers.

"We need staff to do the work," he said. "We're really struggling in in-take workers when someone reports abuse or neglect and having somebody to work on those concerns. That's where we really fall short."

He wants to add a full-time intake worker for adult protective services "for the abuse, neglect and exploitation of our elderly."

Foster case cases continue to creep up. He said on the last day of November, there were 76 children in foster care in Medina County. In the month of November, 81 children spent at least one day in foster care.

He wants to hire a foster care recruiter to his staff.

Felton said once he takes care of his staffing issues. he'll work on some different programming.

"There are things we are anxious to do together (with Toth and Titterington)," he said. "There are a lot of opportunities on the horizon I'm really excited about."

Titterington wanted to thank all the voters who supported the levy.

"This is new money," he said. "This is money going directly to our agencies. You're going to see good work.

"We will continue to collaborate to make a difference," Titterington added. "By passing the levy, you said, 'We like how you're helping the citizens of Medina County.' "

He said ADAMH Board is forming an outpatient, trauma-informed child family center.

"It will be a place where families feel comfortable and get the intensive psychiatric treatment and counseling," Titterington said.

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