

 **THE ALPENA NEWS**[Print this Page](#)[←--back to story](#)**Youth homes feeling pinch of economy**

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POSTED: March 23, 2009

Youth treatment homes in Northeast Michigan are beginning to feel the squeeze of a slow economy. The nonprofit organizations are continuing to keep their doors open by making subtle operational changes and budgeting slow arriving state money.

Huron House, a boys home in Alpena, has used donations from area institutions to help supply its residents with everyday necessities.

"We have certainly had to do a lot of cost cutting. We rely heavily on state funding, but at times the state is slow to pay us," Huron House Coordinator Arthur Ohlrich said. "Donations from some of our local benefactors are down as well. We have been using donations of stuff like hygiene products from local churches to help offset some our costs."

There has been discussions about some of the area homes merging with others as a way to cut costs, but it hasn't come to that point in Alpena - yet.

"There has been some merging between homes. We have actually taken over some things ourselves such as the foster program from the Child and Family Services," Ohlrich said. "We have been doing everything we can. We don't do maintenance unless it has to be done; we get the furniture we need from the Habitat Store and take donations from the community. We are doing whatever we can to make it work."

Although the homes haven't had to implement layoffs as of yet, if things don't improve they may be on the horizon.

"We have had positions where people left and we were unable to refill them," Ohlrich said. "There may come a time when we may have to begin cutting jobs, but as of now we are holding our own. Our staff hasn't had a raise in some time. They have been extremely patient and dedicated. We appreciate them, because we could potentially lose who we have."

At Hope House, an all girls facility, Program Director Peggy Krajniak pays extra attention to the amount of help on the clock in comparison to the amount of work needed to be done.

"We have had to make some adjustments when it come to labor," Krajniak said. "We have to be sure we don't schedule more to a shift than what is needed."

Huron House has noticed the courts attempting to use other avenues of dicipline and treatment in order to scale back the number of boys and girls in the homes. Huron House is licensed to shelter 14 boys, but it hasn't been at its capacity in quite some time.

"The numbers are down and have been for over a year," Ohlrich said. "We have been down about two or three for the last six months. I am expecting a couple this week though. They are starting to send them to other treatment options. It might be for drugs, physical abuse or behavioral issues, but they aren't as quick to send them to a home. They are also in some cases shortening the length of stay."

The girls home can house 13, and has 10 currently, but Krajniak expects the facility to fill back up.

"I think we will keep our numbers up," Krajniak said. "The girls are still doing things and they have to have some place to send them. They can send them to a foster home, but then they don't get the treatment they need. They can send them back home, but they don't get the treatment and usually end up back in trouble. I think we are pretty stable."

Many of the teens who are being housed at the homes are from other parts of Michigan. The families who are struggling financially used to be able to get a certain amount of funding from the homes for visiting and therapy sessions. Those days are in the past however.

"There used to be a time when we could provide money to the families who couldn't afford to come and help in the treatment," Ohlrich said. "With the way things are now we just aren't able to do it anymore."

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