

Children's Service Center celebrating 160 years of service

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The Children's Service Center is seen on South Franklin Street, Wilkes-Barre, in this file photo. Founded as the Home for Friendless Children during the Civil War, CSC is celebrating 160 years of service in 2022

Times Leader file photo



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WILKES-BARRE — Founded as the Home for Friendless Children during the Civil War, Children's Service Center is celebrating 160 years of service in 2022 by honoring all those who have helped CSC become the region's leading behavioral health provider for children, adults, and families in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

Michael P. Hopkins, President and CEO of Children's Service Center, opens the 160th anniversary luncheon at the Westmoreland Club last week.

Times Leader file photo



Three young clients served by Children's Service Center led the crowd in the Pledge of Allegiance at CSC's 160th anniversary luncheon last week.

Times Leader file photo

Mike Hopkins, President/CEO at Children's Service Center, said the mere fact that CSC has been around for so long speaks volumes about the success the agency has had.

"Over the years we have made the changes we had to make to remain relevant and to continue to have a positive impact on the community we serve," Hopkins said. "It is mind-boggling when you realize that we were founded when Abraham Lincoln was president."

Broad service area

CSC now operates 26 programs in seven locations and across 19 school districts, and its adult care affiliate, Robinson Counseling Center (RCC), served more than 11,000 people in 2021.

CSC's specialized teams support families across Luzerne, Lackawanna, Montour, Northumberland, Schuylkill, Snyder, Susquehanna, Wayne and Wyoming counties.

"Together with our partners in care, Children's Service Center and Robinson Counseling Center are working to erode the stigma associated with mental health and substance use disorders so that more people reach out, viewing professional help as a natural step toward leading more fulfilling lives," Hopkins said. "Also, our ability to change and adapt has been key in continuing for CSC to offer the services needed by the people we serve."

One major change, Hopkins said, is CSC's client base. He said less than 10 years ago, CSC was serving a couple hundred adult clients, but today, that number has grown to 5,200 adults.

"The ability of CSC to change to the needs of our clients is critically important," Hopkins said. "CSC has continued to develop as our community has changed and serving adults is a big change for us. Ten years ago, I don't think any of us were thinking that we would be serving over 5,000 adult clients today. It's a great example of the organization being flexible enough to evolve with the changing needs of the community."

CSC continues to serve children — more than 6,700 annually, Hopkins said.

“Over our 160 years, children have always been our main focus,” Hopkins said. “But we have worked for adults as well.”

Hopkins said CSC’s annual budget is \$31 million and the agency employs 485 full- and part-time employees.

“The longevity of CSC speaks volumes to the support we have received from our funders, the foundations, our Board of Directors, political advocates, our local community and the individuals we serve,” Hopkins said. “I’m not aware of any non-profit the size of CSC with the mission to serve the needs of the community that have been able to survive 160 years — and not only survive, but thrive in an ever-changing world. The resiliency of the organization is only matched by those individuals we serve. It’s also a testament to the current and past staff that have made the sacrifice to help those in need.”

In the future, Hopkins said CSC hopes to continue to add critical services, such as Primary Health Care and expanded substance use disorder services with the goal of improving the overall health and well-being of those served.

‘Ability to adjust’

Colleen Horn Doyle, Esq., General Counsel at McCarthy Tire Service, serves as CSC’s board chair. She said she has found CSC to be a remarkable organization, and she said she is truly honored to serve as its Chairman of the Board of Directors.”

“I attribute the success and longevity of the Children Service Center to its ability to adjust to the changing times and its proactive approach of the CSC leadership,” she said. “Mike Hopkins and his team have a remarkable dedication to this organization and its mission. He is constantly analyzing the additional needs of the community members that CSC already serves, as well as exploring the needs of other communities outside the current CSC footprint to see how we can help.”

Horn Doyle said as a mother, she can appreciate how particularly challenging the last two years have been on children and on entire families.

“I believe that the wonderful staff at Children’s Service Center has risen to the challenge and provided the critical services needed for these members of our community during these tough times,” she said.

Progress, expansion

In November 2021, CSC announced the expansion of its outpatient clinic as “the right thing to do.”

Several local legislators, board members, staff and supporters gathered at CSC on South Franklin Street to break ground on the new three-story, 12,516-square foot, \$5.5 million addition.

At the time, Hopkins said the outpatient clinic needed to be expanded to offset CSC’s immense growth in clients served.

“This addition of space is timely for the Children’s Service Center,” Hopkins said. “When we built the addition to the clinic in 2018, we were serving 6,048 clients. By the end of 2022 that number is projected to be 11,383.”

Hopkins said in 2018, the Children’s Service Center introduced an integrated physical and behavioral health care program when it opened a new 27,400 square-foot clinic on South Franklin Street in Wilkes-Barre. At that time, CSC and its affiliate, the Robinson Counseling Center (RCC), were serving approximately 6,048 children, adolescents, and adults through 25 programs.

Hopkins said since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, CSC and RCC have remained open and have witnessed an increase in those seeking services across most programs.

Hopkins added that with the success of CSC’s Integrated Health Care Program comes challenges. He said to deal with space issues, during January 2021, CSC’s Board of Directors approved a plan to construct the new 12,516-square foot, three-story addition to CSC’s clinic.

Plans for the new space include:

- Moving primary care to the first floor of the addition with a separate entrance. This move opens up the ability to be available for services seven days a week.
- Adding laboratory services to the CSC's integrated care program.
- Adding 34 offices for individual therapy and medication management.

Moving forward

In 2017, Children's Service Center integrated primary care with its behavioral health services to provide more comprehensive medical care to clients in Wilkes-Barre. Current construction on the main campus in Luzerne County will complete the Conyngham Primary Health Care Center in 2022. Named for one of CSC's founding families, the center will house a primary care team of physicians, physician assistants, and certified registered nurse practitioners to treat children, adults, and families, offering pharmacy and other services in one convenient setting.

Hopkins said CSC remains true to its roots as a beloved home for orphans by continuing a very active and successful Adoption and Foster Care Program.

"Just as this mission-focused effort was meant to address the total health and well-being of children in need, CSC and RCC are committed to further developing an integrated model for behavioral health and primary care that will meet the needs of our clients for generations to come," Hopkins said. "Much of our community is at-risk regarding the social determinants of health, namely poverty, education, employment, and lifestyle challenges that deter them from leading healthy, productive lives."

Since national statistics report that more than half of Americans with mental health and addiction problems do not seek care for their conditions, CSC and RCC know there is more work to do to address the stigma, prejudice and discrimination often present for people with mental illness.

To put it simply, Hopkins said CSC and RCC's forward focus is to encourage more people to reach out, viewing professional help as a natural step toward leading more fulfilling lives.