



Bestself Lands \$8.6M State Grant to Bolster Crisis Mental Health Services

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Jul 22, 2022

BestSelf Behavioral Health is adding 43 jobs and expanding access to intensive crisis services in Buffalo with new state funding.

The company, the region's largest provider of mental health services, is among nine providers statewide tapped to share a \$75 million pot of funding to create 24-hour intensive crisis stabilization centers to help children and adults experiencing a behavioral health crisis.

BestSelf, which will serve a five-county region, will receive \$8.67 million over five years, including \$1.67 million for start-up costs plus annual operational funds of \$1.4 million.

The agency is also eligible for up to \$1 million in capital funding to outfit its building at 430 Niagara St., where BestSelf leases 15,000 square feet and already offers 24-hour service through its Certified Community Health Center program, funded through a federal grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

CEO Elizabeth Woike-Ganga said the clinic will garner an estimated \$2.75 million more in annual Medicaid reimbursements for services provided at the site.

"It's more of a medical kind of hospital diversion," she said. "It's going to provide an option for folks who are experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis who don't require a trip to an emergency room or inpatient stay to be able to get services and treatment."

The new intensive crisis center will be able to provide a higher level of medical services from nurses, psychiatrists and nurse practitioners who will staff the site.

The state funding bolsters BestSelf's budget, growing it from \$100 million to \$105 million for 2022 and adding to its 1,300-person workforce. The agency has grown significantly since it was created in 2017 through a merger of Lake Shore Behavioral Health and Child & Adolescent Treatment Services, when revenue totaled \$35 million. Woike-Ganga took over as CEO in 2020.

Earlier this year, BestSelf received final state approvals to take over operations of the Renaissance Addiction Services programs in West Seneca on the Kids Escaping Drugs campus, adding 70 employees.

Statewide, the new centers will be developed under the Office of Mental Health and the Office of Addiction Services and Supports will help any individual experiencing an acute mental health or substance use crisis. Funding includes \$15 million for start-up costs through a federal supplemental community mental health services block grant.