

Nonprofit to open middle school for girls at risk of self-harm in Sullivan County

EverGreen Meadow Academy, which will enroll girls from across the state, is being built amid a growing mental health crisis for girls

By [Lana Bellamy](#), Staff Writer
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Stacey Millman, president of EverGreen Meadow Services and Academy, left, walks the grounds of a future residential treatment center and middle school for girls in Rock Hill with consulting engineer Glenn Smith, middle, and former Center for Discovery CEO Patrick Dollard, who is helping advise on the project on Nov. 15, 2024. EverGreen Meadow Academy was recently given about \$2 million from the state to help with the early stages of the project.

Studio Luz/Provided by EverGreen Meadow Academy

Editor's note: This story is about children who are at risk of self-harm and mentions suicidal ideation. If you or someone you know needs help, contact the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting 988, or at 988lifeline.org/chat.

THOMPSON — When Stacey Millman was searching for mental health services for her 13-year-old daughter in 2017, she was shocked by the lack of options.

Sure, she could take her to the emergency room, but what would happen after they discharged her? For a mother who said she was sleeping with “one eye open and one foot on the ground” because she was scared her daughter would harm herself, an in-and-out medical visit was insufficient.

She looked for residential treatment centers but they were either full or hours away from their home in rural Sullivan County. Millman eventually settled on a residential program out west, in Utah.

“I made a promise to her and to myself that if we got through this, we were going to do for New York state families what we didn’t have available for us,” Millman said.

With treatment, her daughter, now 21, has improved her mental health. And Millman has set out to fulfill her vow through a nonprofit she founded in 2021, [EverGreen Meadow Services](#).

Based in Cohecton, a Sullivan County town of less than 2,000 residents, EverGreen started by providing in-person and virtual mental health services to boys and girls at risk of harming themselves. The boys and girls can be referred to EverGreen by a hospital or school, or parents can directly request services through the nonprofit’s website. In some cases, EverGreen refers boys to [Mountain Lake Academy](#), a state-approved residential school that offers therapeutic services in Lake Placid.

But that was just the start. Now, the nonprofit is eyeing its biggest venture yet: EverGreen Meadow Academy, a residential treatment center and school for middle school girls that is scheduled to open by fall 2026.

EverGreen’s project comes at a time when health care professionals are warning of [a troubling rise](#) in the number of adolescent and teenage girls at risk of self-harm.

Last month, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced that the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York has given the nonprofit nearly \$2 million to help finance the early stages of the project. DASNY, a public benefit corporation, helps finance, design and build health and education infrastructure.

“The rise in young girls seeking emergency care due to self-harm is an alarming trend, and it’s essential that we address this issue head-on by providing specialized trauma-informed care and support right here in New York,” Hochul said in a statement released by her office. “I pushed for this grant to help build the infrastructure for EverGreen Meadow Academy’s residential treatment center and middle school, giving girls in need the education and treatment they deserve, in a healing environment, and at no cost to their families.”

EverGreen’s school will be built on 34 acres donated by The Center for Discovery in the Sullivan County hamlet of Rock Hill. [The Center for Discovery](#) is a nonprofit research and specialty center offering residential, medical, clinical and special education.



Architects and EverGreen Meadow Services and Academy review site maps and topography on Nov. 15, 2024, during a walk-through of the future site of a residential treatment center and middle school for girls in Rock Hill. Studio Luz

The school will accept 24 students at a time in grades 6 through 8 from all over New York, and the state will cover their residential and tuition costs, Hochul's office said.

"Our mission is to provide hope and healing to young girls of all identities, ethnicities, cultures and incomes who have experienced trauma and are struggling with anxiety, depression and other mental health conditions that can lead to self-harm," Millman said during an interview, adding: "Many of the girls who will find their way into our school will have experienced a hospital admission, are not able or ready to go back to their home schools, and will need a safe, specialized, nurturing environment in which to learn and heal at the same time. We're building the only residents-only community for girls of this specific age when they are most open and susceptible to support and change to heal and learn together 24/7 in the same safe, nurturing environment."

How combined school and treatment will work

The school and its teachers, including special education teachers, will be [accredited](#) by the state Education Department. Class sizes will be small and the teachers will be informed about students' clinical care so they can support their treatment, Millman said.

Combining school with treatment was important to Millman because she didn't want girls to feel like they had to sacrifice their education to improve their mental health. Falling behind in school can affect confidence, and self-esteem can be a major challenge for girls during their formative middle school years, Millman noted.

“Developmentally, they’re going from young childhood, when they’re totally dependent on adults, to young adulthood. But they’re not there yet, so they are still open to having safe adults in their lives to help guide them,” Millman explained. “That’s the sweet spot for us. That’s when we want to reach girls.”

Keeping enrollment girls-only will hopefully help students cope together.

“Because the need is greater for girls right now, and there already exists a school for boys, I will say that our mission is to create that space for girls to grow and heal and learn together, dealing with the issues that many of them have in common from early childhood trauma,” Millman said.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported [a dramatic increase](#) in teenage girls who felt persistently sad and hopeless from 2011 to 2021 — double the number of boys. The study also found more girls were experiencing suicidal thoughts and behaviors. Researchers noted that school environments and related activities “make a profound difference” in improving teenagers’ mental health because of the built-in network of staff, teachers and mentors.

The EverGreen school will broaden that network by involving students’ families in their treatment. When Millman sought help for her daughter, their whole family benefited from a better understanding of how trauma is passed down through generations.

“We’re not just changing the life of a girl — we’re changing a part of her family and the communities in which they live,” Millman said.

‘An upstream answer to downstream issues’

Access to health care has long been a problem in the state’s rural areas, [especially in the Catskills](#). As some providers shrink their footprints, Sullivan residents have been forced to drive to Middletown or further for services. Those challenges are even greater when looking for specialized mental health care, which is part of why Millman is opening EverGreen Meadow Academy in Sullivan County.

State Sen. Peter Oberacker, whose 51st District includes Sullivan County, has praised the state’s investment in EverGreen Meadow Academy. He told the Times Union that projects like these are “an upstream answer to downstream issues.”

“Any time that we can work on trauma, work on mental health, what does that cure or what does that prevent or deter down from that?” said Oberacker, who is the ranking member on the Senate’s Committee on Alcoholism and Substance Use Disorders.

“We could say with a lot of clarity that this type of treatment is definitely not going to be detrimental as we try to keep our young folks away from opioids, alcohol and things of that nature.”

Millman agreed that treatment and interventions need to begin early on for children.

“Early childhood trauma, when untreated, leads to lifelong struggles and mental health conditions, and that’s why I want to give our young girls every opportunity for their future to lead healthy, productive, happy lives,” she said.

How to get help, what to look out for

Warning signs of suicide

- Talking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain

- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious, agitated, or recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Giving away meaningful possessions
- Making final arrangements

What to do

- Listen and acknowledge the person's emotions
- Ask about suicidal thoughts: "Some people in your situation have thought about suicide. Have you? Are you now?"
- Do not leave the person alone
- Remove any firearms, alcohol, drugs, or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt
- Call the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at 988
- Take the person to an emergency room, or seek help from a medical or mental health professional

Free resources

- **National Suicide Prevention Hotline:** 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- **Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** 988
- **Crisis Chat**, a national suicide prevention organization that offers online support and crisis intervention: 988lifeline.org/chat
- **Greene County:** Contact Mobile Crisis at 518-943-5555 or the mental health on-call service during non-business hours at 518-622-3344
- **Columbia County:** Contact [Emergency Mental Health Services](https://www.columbiahealthservices.org/emergency-mental-health-services) at 518-828-9446
- **Ulster County:** Call or text the Family of Woodstock Crisis Line at 845-338-2370 or 845-679-2485
- **Dutchess County:** Call or text HELPLINE at 845-485-9700
- **Orange County:** Contact the [Orange County Crisis Call Center's Helpline](https://www.orangethroughcrisis.org/) at 800-832-1200
- **Putnam County:** Contact the [Putnam County Crisis Intervention Hotline](https://www.putnamcrisis.org/) at 845-225-1222
- **Rockland County:** Text "HOME" to 741741 to start a conversation or call the Behavioral Health Response Team at 845-517-0400
- **Westchester County:** Contact the Crisis Prevention and Response Team at 914-925-5959