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Mental health facility changes name to combat stigma

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By Charles Molineaux - [email](#)

HUNTSVILLE, AL (WAFF) - The Mental Health Center of Madison County is hoping to help more people who need it by changing its own name. The center's leaders say they're afraid stigma attached to mental health care is scaring people away.

Mental Health Center of Madison Executive Director Brian Davis says two thirds of people who need mental health or addiction treatment don't get it, at least in part because the dark cloud society attaches to it.

"Talk about the term mental illness we think of the old images of giant state institutions that are archaic and we think of violence and we think of people that are unsafe and that's just not reality", said Davis.

The mental health center reports serving almost nine thousand people a year but Davis says more could be helped under a more inviting and friendly marquee.

Before the Huntsville city council, he announced the Mental Health Center will, as of Oct. 1, be doing business under the name WellStone Behavioral Health, "stone" for strength. "well" reflecting an emphasis on wellness instead of illness.

He says the reset has been tried successfully before.

"We re-branded our children's services about 5-years ago and it has gone under the brand of the Novus Center for Youth and Family and it has helped us double our children's services and reach more families and their young people earlier because it helps we have avoided all of the stigma that comes with the case of mental health that was right there in our name", said Davis.

Davis says the center's own research backs up the need for a new label and that there have been ample cases of people who have regretted not coming in sooner.

"Most people wait upwards of 10-years from the time that they first start having problems to when they finally seek treatment from a professional. Because of the words 'mental health'? Because of the stigma that comes with the cause and the idea that you should be able to pull yourself up by your bootstraps and just white knuckle it through there", stated Davis.

Davis says the re-branding is the result of extensive research and planning involving a wide array of stakeholders.

On a corporate level, the non-profit Mental Health Center of Madison County stays the same but publicly it'll be WellStone.

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