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Making the move

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another place from which to help people.

Pat Thomas, the coordinator for Adult Basic Education Southwest Minnesota, said the clients and community are the ones negatively impacted by the move.

“It is unfortunate that ABE was unable to maintain its location at the courthouse,” Thomas said.

“I see this as an economic issue. If one considers all the services provided to residents out of the courthouse one can see their function is to serve as a safety net to individuals who are struggling. Their purpose would be one of helping individuals move to a place of economic stability to be able to participate in our communities as good citizens. Education plays a very critical role in helping individuals move beyond the need of these safety nets. The ability to be co-located in the same building as an educational agency provides huge benefits to our common customers.”

Thomas said the move added another impediment to people seeking services.

“Sometimes it is hard for those who do not need these services to understand the challenge or new barrier that now exists to students needing our educational services,” she said. *“These new barriers are transportation and the fact that referrals no longer can be made by walking the individual to the location of the educational agency. For our agency the new challenge will be attempting to maintain the type of relationships with our courthouse partners that contributed to student success.”*



Thomas is a firm believer in the value of collaboration among entities and she was helped by Bruce Lamprecht of Marshall Public Schools and Scott VanderMillen of Marshall Community Services. They set up visits to potential sites. Thankfully, Southwest Minnesota State University had empty classrooms in the social science building on the first floor.

“Bruce and Scott were amazing in setting up visits to potential sites for a new location and on the day we moved the biggest job I had was to stay out of the way of all the folks who moved us,” said Thomas. “Public school staff and Community Services staff coordinated the move. We began the move a bit before 8 a.m. and everything was out of the courthouse by 11 a.m. It was amazing!”

Thomas appreciates her new digs.

“SMSU has been totally awesome as our new landlord and neighbor,” she said. “They have done everything in their power to make this a good experience. We knew parking for our students would be a potential problem. The SMSU Public Safety staff have been totally accommodating and have worked with us beyond the call of duty as we together help students understand parking restrictions. They have voided parking tickets when misunderstandings have occurred and again been so very, very helpful.”

“Yes, kudos to Southwest Minnesota State University. They really worked hard on our wants and needs in getting the place ready by July 31,” said Lamprecht.

Marshall Public Schools is the fiscal agent for ABE. There is a joint powers agreement with the city of Marshall and Community Services.

“It’s another example of working together for the betterment of the community,” Lamprecht said.

The new quarters works out well for the ABE staff.

The space *“feels larger. We’re more spread out,”* Thomas said.

Thomas said they have maintained the number of current students that they had been helping before at the courthouse. As to future students, they have no way of knowing how many they have lost by not being among the agencies that provide so many

needed services.

“We have maintained the current students, but the number of new people is down,” she said.

Students taking public transportation have a trek across campus to get to classes.

“Students who come on public transportation have been able to find their way across the whole campus as SMSU Facilities and Physical building staff helped us find the right place to put signs up indicating the correct path,” Thomas said. “Public transportation drops folks off at the conference center and students need to make their way from that point to the most northern part of the campus at the Social Science building.”

Thomas said smooth access to services is vital to serve the ABE’s clients, which benefits the larger community.

“Since a vast majority of students are immigrants or refugees one needs to consider that if this region cannot attract and retain this population this community will suffer,” she said. “This population is needed for our workforce and has been the reason our county is not diminishing in population as our neighbor counties have experienced.”