

Innovative plan for homeless gets \$2 million

WakeMed makes grant for facility's construction

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RALEIGH — Plans to bring a model homeless shelter to Wake County got a boost Tuesday, when WakeMed pledged \$2 million to help build The Healing Place, an innovative residential program providing substance-abuse treatment for homeless people.

The grant requires organizers to come up with the rest of the money to open the \$4.5 million facility. Organizers hope to open the building, housing 165 men, by fall 2000. The group also hopes to start a separate women's facility three years later.

WakeMed's president, Ray Champ, announced the grant during a reception co-sponsored by Maria Spaulding, the Wake County human services director; Barbara Goodmon, a member of the Wake County Human Services board, and Fred Barber, senior vice president at Capitol Broadcasting Co. — the three people who have worked since June to model a local program after the celebrated Healing Place, a nonprofit organization based in Louisville, Ky.

SHELTER

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"This is a program for people who are addicted to drugs and alcohol," Barber said. "Two-thirds of the people who have finished the program have stayed clean. Our commitment is that we will replicate the program exactly as it is. Our goal was to stir up interest, and out of that, we have our first significant gift. We're really excited."

Organizers haven't said exactly where they will get the additional money. They also have yet to find a site for the proposed shelter, a challenge that has stymied other projects for the homeless population in Raleigh and Wake County. Last year, Wake County backed away from a proposed shelter site on Morgan Street in Raleigh because of opposition from neighbors and the Raleigh City Council.

Dennis Parnell, interim executive director of The Healing Place, said it plans to announce a location "as close to downtown as possible," within two months. Parnell, a former substance-abuse specialist at WakeMed, is being paid by Capitol Broadcasting, whose president, Jim Goodman, is married to Barbara Goodman.

Working out of the Briggs Hardware Building, in an office provided by the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, Parnell is completing a business plan and assembling a staff.

WakeMed is funding the grant through a \$4 million Community Health Initiative Fund, established in 1997 to improve health care for the indigent. The fund was set up when the hospital split from Wake County, which required WakeMed to spend part of its revenues on charity care.

"The proper treatment of alcohol and the homeless is a real problem for the medical community," Champ said. "Too often patients end up in emergency rooms. This is a disease, and it is proper that the medical community take the lead in a productive way."

Spaulding, Goodman and Barber

WAKE COUNTY'S HOMELESS POPULATION

- Number of homeless individuals: about 1,900
- Estimated number of individuals in need of substance-abuse treatment: 1,250
- Beds for homeless: 372
- County caseworkers to provide services to homeless substance abusers: 2
- Shelters that can safely accept an inebriated homeless person: 0
- Number of times in 1997 county transported an intoxicated homeless person to Wake Medical Center: 2,000
- Cost in 1997 for such ambulance services: \$1.4 million

SOURCE: WAKE COUNTY, THE HEALING PLACE

were among 18 community leaders who visited The Healing Place in Louisville last summer. The three said they returned with a mission to replicate the program, which relies on a homeless shelter framework but also offers substance-abuse counseling and increased privileges as addicts move through stages of recovery.

Since then, the three have held 40 lunches with potential donors and community leaders and connected with architects from Envirotek Inc., to create renderings of how the the local building, complete with an outdoor basketball court, would look.

Organizers showed the colorful sketches at a daylong substance-abuse seminar at N.C. State University's McKimmon Center on Tuesday, and later that evening at the reception at the Briggs Building.

"This is a very, very blessed day for us and we can hardly believe that in the time that we have been together that we have garnered this much support," Spaulding said. "I had made the commitment that at the end of the year 2000, we would have a Healing Place here, and that looks like it will be a reality."

The group plans to operate on a \$1 million annual budget, with 60

percent coming from private contributions. The rest would come from government grants, Spaulding said.

The 5-year-old Healing Place in Louisville has been hailed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It has been copied in Athens, Ga., and Lexington, Ky.

The program provides a non-medical detoxification center and a 12-step recovery program based on Alcoholics Anonymous. The services work together to help addicts reach sobriety and to employ those in recovery.

Chris Fajardo, project director of The Healing Place in Louisville, said he thinks of the program in biological terms. The substance abusers are comparable to cultures that can grow or die in a petri dish, he said, and The Healing Place is an environment that nurtures them.

"If you think about the human organism who is an addict or alcoholic, if they are in certain cultures, their chances of survival are small," said Fajardo, who was in Raleigh for the announcement. "We try to create an environment where an addict can thrive and grow."

Parnell, a former substance abuser who has been sober 13 years, said that managed care and other cutbacks have gutted many recovery programs.

The Fletcher Foundation, a private philanthropic organization, has agreed to hire a consultant to work with The Healing Place planners for the next year to set up a fund-raising system, said Tom McGuire, executive director of the Fletcher Foundation.

Elected officials who attended the reception Tuesday said the effort to bring The Healing Place to Wake County is worthwhile.

"It is a proven rehabilitation project for people who have problems with drugs," said Vernon Malone, chairman of the Wake Board of Commissioners. "We have corporate leadership to move it forward."

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