

...ing from substance abuse treatment center) tells Donnie Lyles (with back to camera) what is expected of him now that he has been promoted to silverchip status at The Healing Place of Wake County, a substance abuse treatment center. Silverchip is the highest status a participant can reach while living at The Healing Place.

A place to heal at home

Group tours site in Raleigh, plans facility for helping Durham addicts

BY CLAUDIA ASSIS

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Jerry Jones' life was getting high on the streets of Raleigh.

"I was lost, just drinking and drugging," said Jones, 47.

Robert Christmas had tried seven times to quit drinking and stay off the streets.

"I got comfortable about living on the streets," said Christmas, 52, who lost his job of 24 years when his drinking escalated. "I was afraid to try a new way of life."

Both men are recovering addicts at The Healing Place of Wake County and shared their stories with a group of Durham pastors, mental health professionals and county officials who visited the Raleigh substance abuse program Tuesday.

"This place gave me a chance to live good again," Jones said.

The Durham group left with hopes of bringing a similar



Fred Barker, of The Healing Place, explains the program's bedding arrangements to a Durham group that hopes to build a similar substance abuse treatment program here.

model of substance abuse treatment to the Bull City.

"Clearly, this is a model we will look more into," said the Rev. Thomas "Bernie" Bass Jr., executive director of the Durham Community House of Recovery, a halfway house for addicted women, and a Clayton pastor who grew up in Durham.

Bass and other Durham pastors have pushed for an inpatient substance abuse program in town. The pastors have favored using Oakleigh, a

Durham Regional Hospital drug-treatment facility that closed its doors two years ago, to house the program. But after seeing how The Healing Place works, it could be better to have a specially designed facility to launch a similar program in Durham, Bass said.

"I am extremely impressed. We have to go back and as a group do some more discussion," he said.

Commissioner Phil Cousin, who serves as a liaison between the group of pastors

and the Durham County Board of Commissioners, said a program akin to The Healing Place in Durham is "very feasible." The Raleigh program is narrow and focused, and it is not trying to be a cure-all, he said, adding that he plans to make a presentation about the visit to his fellow commissioners in August.

Substance abuse is the underlying problem in a great number of arrests connected to violent crimes and property crimes, said Police Chief Steve Chalmers, who was also part of the Durham delegation.

"If any community is serious about reducing crime, they have to take advantage of programs like this," Chalmers said.

Mental Health Board Chairman Doug Wright said that the Tuesday group probably would meet soon to discuss their new ideas and how to proceed. The challenge for Durham is going to be to work together and be inclusive in the upcoming discussions, he said.

The only requirements to stay at The Healing Place are to be male, homeless and

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addicted to alcohol or drugs, program coordinators said. It follows the Alcoholics Anonymous 12-step program and offers overnight shelter and a nonmedical detoxification program, in which medicines are not prescribed.

Men accepted into the long-term substance abuse treatment program slowly earn their stripes and gain more responsibilities and rights, with small rewards along the way. In the initial levels, five men share a cubicle with shoulder-length walls and little privacy, and have only a black trunk for their belongings.

As they progress, however, they share bigger rooms with fewer people and enjoy small niceties such as chests of drawers, desks, closets and the use of telephones. Men in the program take turns handling security, laundry, kitchen and cleaning duties, so they are invested in the program and in their recovery, officials said.

"This is a mutual help program," said Executive Director Dennis Parnell. "It is just like a good marriage. You are independent, but also interdependent."

It takes about eight months to complete the program, and about three to six months for the men to get a footing in life and navigate toward independent living.

The program costs about \$25 a day per person, Parnell said, noting that the Wake County Jail, at about \$60 a day, is the nearest competitor.

The group is launching a

fundraising campaign to build an 80-bed women's facility, which is expected to be up and running by 2006.

In 1998, Raleigh officials visited The Healing Place in Louisville, Ky., and came back to start an intense fundraising campaign. They opened Raleigh's program in January 2001, strictly following the Louisville model.

With an operating budget of \$1.4 million, it received about \$240,000 from the Wake County Board of Commissioners and \$650,000 from the Wake County ABC Board, with the remainder coming from private donations.

With 23 full-time employees, The Healing Place also has volunteers, including six physicians, four nurses and one physician's assistant working in its clinic.

It has served some 2,400 people, including those who have entered the detox program and used the emergency shelter. Roughly 900 people have reached the recovery phases, and 116 men have successfully completed the program. Of those who completed the program, 72 percent are currently sober.

If Durham were to open a similar program, Raleigh's Healing Place would help develop it and initially staff the program, as long as it followed the model exactly. The assistance would be free of charge, with Durham having to pay Louisville franchise fees only if it wanted to have "The Healing Place" as its name.