

Center to treat female addicts

The Healing Place, currently for men, offers housing and intensive, months-long therapy

By **BONNIE ROCHMAN**, Staff Writer

RALEIGH -- The telephone keeps jingling, and the inquiries from troubled women keep coming, each call and letter seeking salvation.

"My name is Robena, I am 46 years of age, and I am currently in jail," begins one letter that arrived earlier this year at the Healing Place, a live-in treatment program for homeless drug addicts and alcoholics.

"But I need help, please. I am tired of living like hell..."

For now, the Healing Place serves men only. But in December, a new location off Glenwood Avenue will treat women and their children, too.

The building is next to Umstead State Park on Glen Royal Drive, in a leafy industrial park not far from CarMax. Its 34,000 square feet will house 88 women and up to 11 of their children.

By comparison, the men's center near the State Farmers Market has 180 beds.

A January survey by various human services organizations pegged the number of homeless in Wake County at about 1,100, including 370 women, said Allen Reep, director of development.

Women who enter the new program will be able to walk along a "meditation trail" to be carved by N.C. State University horticulture students from some of the site's eight acres. Their children can cavort in a playground to be built next month by Home Depot volunteers.

The Healing Place has completed most of a \$10 million campaign to underwrite renovation of the building to house the women's center and operating costs through next year for both the men's and women's programs. The campaign also includes a \$1 million endowment. Wake County contributed \$1 million for the new center, and Raleigh gave \$500,000.

There has been some concern about the center's location, about nine miles from downtown Raleigh.

It wasn't supposed to be there. But for a slew of reasons, including neighbors' resistance to living near a group of women in recovery, four other sites didn't work out. Desperate, administrators decided to look for a building they could renovate instead of a site on which to build anew. Three days later, they found a sprawling former computer assembly and training facility and bought it for \$2.5 million.

Phil Jeffreys, a Wake County commissioner and a big booster, said the distance is an asset.

"We need to get people away from what they've been into if we want to get them dried out and get them thinking straight," he said. "They need a place to go where they can calm down."

Law enforcement officials will bring intoxicated women they pick up off the street to the detox clinic at the center instead of carting them off to jail or a hospital. There's also a 12-bed "wet shelter," the only one of its kind in Wake County, for homeless women who aren't sober but aren't falling down drunk.

Both these groups of women, and any other homeless female addicts, can then choose to begin the intensive therapy

that characterizes the Healing Place.

Like the men who live at Wake's original Healing Place, the women will embark on a journey lasting between eight and 14 months. They'll live at the Healing Place while learning about the nature of addiction and "earning" their keep by holding various jobs at the facility. There will also be a child and family specialist who will counsel the women's children.

The program gradually confers more and more independence, culminating with assistance finding jobs and housing and help reuniting them with their children, many of whom are in the custody of social services agencies or family members.

As of July, 68 percent of the men who completed the program remain sober one year later, according to Healing Place statistics.

"We help people start their lives over," said Paige Rainey, employment and housing outreach coordinator. "To be able to give these women the opportunity to make a fresh start and the opportunity to get their kids back, that's awesome."

Staff writer **Bonnie Rochman** can be reached at 829-4871 or brochman@newsobserver.com.