

Healing Place for Women opens

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RALEIGH, N.C. -- The Healing Place for Women, a new 88-bed facility for homeless women dealing with addiction, opened its doors Jan. 16 in Raleigh.

Part of The Healing Place of Wake County, the newly renovated building will serve as a residential rescue and rehabilitation facility available to Wake County women who are homeless and addicted to alcohol or drugs.

Recent counts put that population at about 380 in Wake County, says Dennis Parnell, executive director of The Healing Place.

"But I think that's the tip of the iceberg," he says. "Women are the more hidden population. They're not trying to enter the system, a lot of times because they don't want their children taken away."

Similar to the Healing Place's facility for men, which opened five years ago and has 180 beds, women typically enter the program through the onsite detoxification center or homeless shelter.

Those coming in through detox usually spend three to five days in the center and, at the men's facility, about six in 10 opt to take part in the Healing Place's long-term recovery program.

Women can also enter the program through the facility's 10-bed shelter, the only one Parnell knows of in the area that will accept people while they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

At the shelter, they receive food, clothing, access to a shower and a safe place to stay for the night.

"We meet women where they are and help motivate them into a program of recovery," says Parnell. "We will stay with a person until they get sober. As many times as it takes, we'll take them in and work with them."

Whether coming in through detox or the shelter, new arrivals interact with other program participants, former homeless addicts in various stages of recovery, who encourage the women to join the formal program.

The program begins with classes on coping with addiction, using a curriculum based on the 12-step process, the approach originally designed by Alcoholics Anonymous.

Once women agree to join, voluntarily only, they move into the facility and begin doing simple chores to help with upkeep of the facility, including cleaning, cooking and groundskeeping.

Most of the facility's operations are conducted by participants, with close oversight by an all-female staff.

The on-site medical clinic is staffed mainly by volunteer doctors and nurses.

As women progress through the program, they receive more responsibility and more independence, with most leaving the program after staying clean and sober for about nine months, and only after they have found permanent housing and jobs.

The facility includes a special area, outfitted with a living room, kitchenette and toys, where an on-staff child-family specialist will help the women reunite with their children when appropriate.

There is also space for 12 children to live for a period of time in adjoining rooms as their mothers near graduation from the program.

"Our goal is to stop the next generation of addiction, to help them right now with what's going on so children aren't being born and nurtured into addiction as well," says Parnell.

The Healing Place raised about \$4.5 million to purchase and renovate the building in West Raleigh and already has raised the first year's operating expenses.

More than a week before the opening, Parnell had received a number of calls from interested women and expects the 10-bed overnight shelter to fill up in the first day or two, with the participation in the formal program growing from there.

The Healing Place for Women is located at 3304 Glen Royal Road.