

Healing Place shelter for women opens today

THOMASI MCDONALD, Staff Writer

After months of preparations, The Healing Place of Wake County dedicated a new shelter for women and children Sunday and will welcome its first guests today.

The Healing Place for Women aims to help women caught in the snares of substance abuse and homelessness overcome the destructive cycle and become responsible, productive and self-supporting.

The center is modeled after The Healing Place's men's center, which opened five years ago today on Goode Street near downtown Raleigh.

The 34,000-square-foot women's facility at 3304 Glen Royal Road, near Umstead State Park, has an overnight shelter with 36 beds, with an additional 20 mats for use during severe weather or when temperatures dip below freezing. Unlike other shelters, the center will not turn away someone who is intoxicated.

Executive Director Dennis Parnell said he expects the shelter will house 10 to 15 people on its opening night.

The overnight shelter is the entry point to a six- to nine-month program of treatment and recovery that has beds for 88 women and children.

In addition to shelter and meals, the program includes a medical center to address health care issues such as tuberculosis, AIDS, severe dental problems and malnutrition.

The program has four distinct phases that begin with educating people about their addiction. The final phase focuses on recovery and transition back to the larger society.

Recovery, Parnell noted, is "the longest, most arduous part of the program."

"They are not only responsible for going to classes but for maintaining the facility as if it were their own home," he said. "What we are doing is beginning to build responsibility."

During the transition phase, the recovering addict begins to look at other challenges she may be having with the courts or with employment and finding housing.

The women's recovery begins with substance abuse classes through a program called Off The Street.

"The substance abuse classes are strictly about 'What is the problem?' " Parnell said.

"The problem is not where you came from or how you grew up. The problem is, you have a substance abuse addiction. We keep it real simple for them."

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