

Haven House kids enjoy well-earned spree

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A child's pocket change might not go far when it comes to buying Christmas gifts for the ones they love. But when it came to providing a happy holiday for the young residents at Haven House Transitional Living Center, community members made sure there were affordable gifts.

On Dec. 21, "Friends on the Journey," a group from St. Mary's Catholic Church in Montrose, presented the first "Shepherd's Shopping Spree" at Haven House.

"The ladies came in today with a U-Haul," Rose Berheul, operations director at Haven House, said, as she surveyed tables laden with presents ranging from baby toys and books, to jewelry and cosmetic items.

But the Friends on the Journey weren't accepting money for the Christmas gifts. Instead, young shoppers, who were let in one age group at a time, presented tickets in exchange for gifts bound for their siblings, parents and grandparents.

"All participants have been doing volunteer work. They have earned their tickets. Everyone has worked hard to get presents for their children, and children for their parents or grandparents," Berheul said.

The shopping spree was the idea of Mary McMahon of Ridgway, who participated in similar events in Arizona.

"This is my fifth one. I did it in Arizona and brought the idea here to Colorado," she said.

Part of the inspiration came from an August seminar at the Center for Action and Contemplation, which drew on the work of both St. Francis of Assisi and Pope Francis.

"It was more of not just observing, but of actually doing," McMahon said.

"This time of year, it was the obvious thing to do ... helping to improve their lives and give them a nice Christmas,"



A table of teddy bears await the young residents "shopping" for Christmas gifts at Haven House on Dec. 21.

said Sharon Beshoar, a member of Friends on the Journey. The group has been active for about 30 years.

"This seemed like a natural thing for us to focus on this time of year," Beshoar said.

Group by group, the youngsters came in to the Shepherd's Shop, picking out toy horses, Buzz Lightyear gear and a handbag — loaded with goodies — for Mom.

They then proceeded to gift-wrapping stations, where volunteers

helped deck the presents in festive paper and ribbons. Refreshments, many provided by Friends on the Journey member Kathy Heffernan, capped off the event.

"It's really blossomed," Haven House co-founder Lillian Fredericksen said.

HAND UP

FROM PAGE B1

money for rehabbing the facility.

"That looks like it's all going to go through in January or February. We're really happy and optimistic about having sole ownership of the building after worrying about eviction," Fredericksen said. "One of the great things is that it was done with mostly outside money. It's not like we were diverting money from other worthwhile causes locally."

Funding represents an ongoing challenge, though Haven House has been able to keep abreast of maintenance. The grants it's requested from the state would help with equipment such as furnaces, which have begun to fail.

"The ongoing challenge for us is raising funds for operating expenses. We're able to get the grants we needed for capital and to pay off the notes, but in this nonprofit business, you never know what's going to be in the mail tomorrow," Fredericksen said.

It's all money well spent: Since its inception, Haven House has graduated 90 people and this year, graduated 30, leaving about 30 people at the center as of December.

Haven House is accepting placement applications as a result. The process involves a background check, as well as drug and alcohol testing; Haven House operates on a strict no-alcohol or drugs policy.

"It's a very safe home," said Berheul, who came aboard nine weeks ago as the new director of operations at Haven



Haven House resident Amy Barrett talks about the journey that led her family of five to homelessness, then a second chance.

House. She is assisted by five paid staff members and about 10 volunteers.

The home has curfews,

security cameras and security staff, as well as resident staffers who are onsite around the clock.

Residents contribute to the upkeep, too. "Everyone has chores, just like if you lived in your own home," Berheul said.

The shopping spree taking place at Haven House that day stood as testament: children and adults received tickets they could exchange for gifts, but they had earlier performed chores in order to earn the tickets.

Although Haven House's program is rigorous, an eviction isn't necessarily the end of the road.

Berheul said that just recently, the other residents were asked to consider re-admitting a person who previously failed the program. They agreed on a second chance, even though the person ultimately withdrew the request, Berheul said.

'Coping,' growing

Haven House strives through several in-house programs to meet its goal of breaking the cycle of homelessness.

"The development we're most happy about is our child development program and what our staff is able to do to help the kids," said Fredericksen.

The seven-part program includes counseling, youth groups, spiritual guidance and supplemental educational programs.

"We are very family-oriented. We have many, many children's programs. The biggest and best is that children are warm and safe here," Berheul said.

Parents pitch in to provide child care for others, and act as sounding boards for others, she said.

The facility also offers the Whiz Kids mentoring/tutoring program on Wednesday nights and in January, launches a homework help program that will also be open to Olathe school students, not just Haven House residents.

Berheul performs progress monitoring on the homework program monthly.

Mondays and Fridays bring the Holy Listening counseling program, while youth group is on Thursdays.

"Monday through Thursday,

there's an activity every night for youth," Berheul said.

Adult programs include enrichment classes each Monday; attendance is mandatory unless a person is at work. The enrichment classes have covered such topics as parenting, resume building, time-management and living with chronic conditions.

Berheul formerly ran an educational program for underprivileged children in Denver; but was born and raised in Delta County.

"I've come home," she said. Haven House's need for a youth director attracted her; she added. "That's my passion. My goals here are to raise reading and math scores."

But she does everything in between, too, from scrubbing a toilet to answering the phone or soliciting donations.

"We wear many hats and work many hours," Berheul said.

"It starts with the children: teaching respect, teaching boundaries, and education is what it's all about."

Berheul's passion was a boon to the Barrett family in a direct way.

Amy Barrett said when they first came to Haven House in November of 2014, her daughter, traumatized by crime, was so withdrawn she would not come out of her room.

"The new director is really good with kids. She got my daughter out of her 'closet.' Rose and her have connected. A lot of people have tried to get (daughter) to open up," Barrett said.

She said her family is looking to complete the Haven House program by next spring.

"Our goals are to get more family bonding and find housing," she said.

The family lost its place on the list for a Section 8 housing voucher through Housing and Urban Development, due to a misunderstanding about service animals, she said. They have had to get back on the waiting list and now hope for housing in Montrose, which will provide added stability for their autistic son.

"It's a handful, but we're coping," Barrett said.

Haven House families sometimes have to overcome faulty perceptions when people misunderstand the facility's purpose. Barrett said she's had people assume she is in a rehab center, but that is not true: her family is substance-free. Further, Haven House is not a treatment center.

"This is a place where people can get back on their feet, gain strength and skills and improve their family," Barrett said.



Volunteer Sharon Beshoar of Friends on the Journey gives gift-giving tips to a Haven House resident Dec. 21.