

Childhaven holds open house to thank supporters

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FARMINGTON — The doors of Childhaven were open Thursday for a special Valentine's Day-themed open house.

The event provided city officials, business people and community members a chance to tour the shelter's newly-renovated residential unit, which now allows staff to more closely monitor some of the shelter's children. Along with modernization, updates included equipping several of the bedrooms in the facility with indoor windows to allow staff the ability to keep an eye on children from any location in that area of the facility.

The renovations, which took four months to complete, were made possible by a \$50,000 City of Farmington Community Development Block Grant, as well as an additional \$50,000 donated by Conoco Phillips, San Juan Regional Medical Center, the Merrion Family Foundation and the Childhaven Foundation.

After providing a tour of the facility, Childhaven Chief Executive Officer Erin Hourihan presented donors with large red and pink hearts that had been decorated by the children with glitter, markers, and words of thanks.

"This renovation really opens up an opportunity for Childhaven to take care of more kids with higher level needs," explained Hourihan, who said that some of the children who come to the shelter have attempted suicide as a result of the trauma they've undergone. "Some of the kids also come to us with mental health issues, and opening up this space means we can keep a closer eye on them, and will allow us the ability to take in almost any child. We are so thankful to all of the donors for helping with this project."

The renovation easily qualified for the city's Community Development Block Grant program, said administrator Jay Peterman.

"Because these kids are not currently with their parents, they're presumed low-income by (Department of Housing and Urban Development) standards, so this was an easy fit for the grant," said Peterman, who added that there are still block-grant funds available for qualifying projects.

The renovated area has also been equipped with a large den/computer/television room, so the children can spread out and relax in a home-like setting, which is something many of them have never experienced. For this reason, Hourihan said, the children's schedule is very structured, and a mandatory reading session is part of the nightly routine.

"The kids thrive on the regular schedule," she said. "Many of them have not had any structured parenting, so even those kids who may have mental health issues do better here because there isn't a whole lot of free time for them to sit around and get depressed."

Jamie Church is development director for the Childhaven Foundation, which helps support Childhaven's programs and other programs that assist at-risk youth.

Church said that although the emergency shelter, which can house up to 32 abused, neglected or abandoned children, is the primary focus of Childhaven, the facility also offers family support and behavioral health services, foster care recruitment and training, as well as a children's safehouse and forensic interview program.

Forensic interviews are used during abuse investigations. Bilingual interviewers trained in drawing out truthful information while minimizing further traumatization of the victims coordinate with other professionals involved in the investigations.

Also part of Childhaven is the "Court Appointed Special Advocates program." Program volunteers serve as advocates for abused, neglected and abandoned children who are involved in the court system.

In addition to donations, Childhaven is also constantly in need of local foster parents willing to provide temporary

homes to abused and neglected children.

"Foster homes are really hard to find," said Hourihan. "We're always looking for good homes where it's the right time in a family's life to offer a spare room to a child. We would love to be in the position where there are enough foster homes, because kids need a normal, settled home life."

Hourihan said foster parents don't have to fit a specific "formula." Single people can also serve as foster parents, as long as they are interested in helping a child.

Because many of the children sheltered by Childhaven come to the facility with just the clothes on their backs, donations of clothing and toys are also needed. And volunteer opportunities such as tutoring, reading to the kids, or helping with other projects are available.

To find out more about Childhaven and its programs, call (505) 325-5358.