

The Renton Reporter 4/7/2007

Vision House breaks ground on new transitional housing

by Emily Garland

Since 2000, Vision House has helped more than 500 homeless people find permanent housing. That number will only increase after the newest addition to Renton's nonprofit transitional housing organization opens late this year.

Located in the Highlands, the new building will be adjacent to Vision House's Children's Village, which is four housing units above a childcare facility.

Vision House also operates a 12-unit housing complex just a few blocks away.

Construction of the new building, to be called Children's Village Hedco Building, will begin later this month.

Vision House co-founder Susan Camerer joined staff and community members in celebrating at a groundbreaking ceremony Wednesday afternoon.

"I'm excited," Camerer said. "It's great to be adding more housing units. And it's such a great design, right there so close to the child-care center."

At 4,700 square feet, the new building will house four two-bedroom units. The addition will increase the number of families living at Vision House to 20.

A third structure at the Children's Village site to be built once funds are raised will add three housing units, as well as an after-school program and counseling offices. Another housing complex called Vision House North will break ground next year in Shoreline.

These new complexes will help decrease the 50-family wait list for housing.

Vision House also has two group homes for men recovering from drug and alcohol abuse, one in southeast Renton and the other in Burien.

But the nonprofit's target is homeless mothers with children because statistically, they make up a large portion of the homeless population. Many of these families have been the victims of domestic violence. All are under the area's 30-percent median income.

Staff help connect these families to an array of services, making it possible for them to move into permanent housing.

Last year, all of the families that left Vision House found a place to live. And even one year after leaving Vision House, 90 percent of families remained in permanent housing.

"I don't know of a program around dealing with issues like these that has a record like that," Mayor Kathy Keolker said at Wednesday's groundbreaking ceremony.

Camerer says community support has been a significant factor in the success of Vision House, which she and her husband founded in 1990.

"I always had a clear vision of how the agency would grow, but I didn't realize the generosity of the community coming around our efforts would be like this," she said. "That's been really neat to see."

CamWest Development, Inc. is constructing Children's Village Hedco Building in partnership with HomeAid Master Builders Care. A \$500,000 grant from California's Hedco Foundation is covering half of construction costs. Local businesses donated many of the construction supplies, including windows, plumbing and siding.

HomeAid Master Builders Care is the philanthropic arm of the Master Builders Association of King and Snohomish counties. It is a partnership with HomeAid America, the nation's leading provider of shelter beds.

HomeAid Master Builders Care helped build Vision House's existing Children's Village Complex in 2005.

"This is all about contributing, this is all about giving back," Master Builders Second Vice President Joe Schwab said at the groundbreaking.

Master Builders President Scott Cameron echoed the sentiment.

"It's a proud moment," Cameron said. "It's a really proud moment. "

"Our core mission is to end homelessness, " Cameron added, "And it goes without saying, but I'm going to say it anyway, that Vision House is a leader in our area."

For more information about Vision House, visit www.vision-house.org or call 425-228-6356.

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