

Youth Shelter Should Be up and Running Soon: Privately Funded Facility Is Aiming for June 15 Opening

Front Page News

By Kevin Widdison of the Daily Courier

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Photo. TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

A small group gathers for a tour of the unfinished Heart with a Mission home last week.

A privately operated — and funded — youth shelter could be open in Grants Pass as early as mid-June.

"We had wanted to be open by June 1, but now it's looking more like June 15," said Bruce Cox, who will serve as director of the facility. "We've had a few delays."

The shelter is being established by Hearts With A Mission, a faith-based nonprofit organization that already operates a similar facility in Medford.

The program will serve youths ages 10 through 17. It provides emergency shelter for up to three days. Youths may stay for up to four months with the consent of a parent or guardian.

Cox said referrals will come from family, schools, law enforcement and others.

The shelter is located on Northeast Ninth Street, in a large house that was donated by First Community Credit Union. Cox said that once the remodeling project is complete, it will house 18 youths — nine boys and nine girls.

Residents will receive counseling and mentoring services. They will be encouraged to stay in school and resolve conflicts with their families — or, depending on their age, pursue self-sufficiency.

In Josephine County, both the shelter and the detention facilities inside the Juvenile Justice Center have been closed since 2012. Each unit formerly housed about a dozen youths. The detention side was a lock-up intended to temporarily keep young suspected criminals off the street until they had their day in court, or until their cases were otherwise handled.

Since the 2012 closure of the detention facility, the county has been renting a small number of juvenile jail beds in neighboring counties.

But nothing has been done to replace the shelter side of the facility, which was used to house children who needed protection from the outside world. Some are homeless, others have been abused.

Bill Landis, director of the Grants Pass Department of Public Safety, said he's looking forward to having the shelter in town.

"This will give us the ability to protect kids who need help," he said, pointing to the closure of the county-owned facility.

Landis added that children in need of a shelter are those who might be described as being "beyond parental control."

"A lot of times, all they need is a cooling off period," Landis said. "Maybe it will get them on the right track before they commit a serious crime."

Daron Williams runs Joe's Place, a drop-in center for youths located in downtown Grants Pass. He, too, is looking forward to the opening of the Hearts With A Mission shelter.

"They'll be offering these kids an actual place to live, which is something I don't offer," Williams said. "I see us working hand in hand with them."

Joe's Place, which is open a total of 25 hours a week, offers food, clothing and, in general, somewhere for youths to hang out. Teens can use the on-site washer and dryer to clean their clothes, and Williams hopes to soon have a study room with a computer that teens can use to do their homework. Volunteers at Joe's Place also work with young people to write resumes in an effort to help them find work.

Williams added that there will always be a number of youths who consider themselves too independent to move into a shelter — and he wants Joe's Place to be there to help them.

"Does every kid who comes through here succeed? Nope. We know that," he said. "But if we can help more kids succeed, that's what we're here for."

Hearts With A Mission staff members have recently conducted tours of the new shelter building for community leaders, including members of the Grants Pass City Council and the county Board of Commissioners. On a recent tour, the interior was clearly still a work in progress — plenty of bare studs and visible wiring. But Cox said progress is being made.

He said the greatest need for donations right now is lighting fixtures, hardware such as doors, and sheetrock to finish interior walls.

He added that flooring was donated by Lippert's Carpet One, West Coast Appliance donated major kitchen appliances and, when the time comes, the shelter will be furnished with donations from Gates Home Furnishings.

"And, obviously, we'll need to be fundraising on an ongoing basis to keep the doors open," Cox added.

For more information, call Hearts With A Mission at 541-956-4025.