

SEEKING SHELTER: PART 5

Crisis House is oasis for homeless

Shelter only one in Sussex that accepts children

By Ron MacArthur

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For the past 35 years, Crisis House Emergency Shelter in Georgetown has provided a haven for thousands of homeless people. It was among the first programs in the county and is still the only one that provides refuge for single women who have children.

The shelter – filled to capacity throughout the year – houses 15 adults and up to eight children, depending on their ages. Residents are permitted to stay up to 30 days, but because there are few housing options, some stay a few days longer or come back within a few months.

The goal of staff at the shelter is to help residents stabilize and get a job, and then get out the door to more permanent housing.

But, Director Marie Morole said it's becoming harder to find housing. She said local rooming houses have been converted to single-family homes, and affordable rental mobile homes are almost impossible to find.

"They've all dried up over the past 10 years," she said.

"We have nowhere to send people," she says. "There is nothing affordable. People end up making the circuit of shelters because it's so tough to find permanent housing. We are working with every agency we can, but everyone is in the

same boat."

She says the lack of housing coupled with insufficient transportation options and scarcity of jobs are daily obstacles staff and residents face.

'Celebrate the success stories'

The shelter offers three meals a day, referral services, and job and housing search assistance. Although they don't publicize it, shelter staff feed about 300 walk-ins each month. "We have limited space, and the building is old, but we provide a lot for what we have," Morole said.

"This is like a big family where people can find peace. Even so, people come in here with a lot of baggage," said Program Director Nancy Woodruff. "You have to love your job and celebrate the success stories."

The shelter is housed in the same building where the program began in February 1982 when a state grant helped purchase the Railroad Avenue property. Morole admits the house is held together with a wing and a prayer. "We need a new building or a major makeover of this one," she said.

Crisis House residents must pass a background check, and they must have no record of sexual or violent offenses. They must also remain alcohol and drug free during their time at the shelter. "But we work with people who are trying to get clean," Woodruff said.

Crisis House collaborates with The Way Home program in Georgetown to provide emergency housing for inmates who are released from prison. "They come here with nothing. For some we not only provide clothing but IDs, Social Security cards and even birth certificates," Woodruff said.

Shelter staff also make referrals to other agencies for residents who have medical or mental health issues. They work with the Veterans Administration to find services and housing for veterans who walk

through the Crisis House door.

State and federal funds, and donations from foundations, individuals, churches, organizations and businesses make up the shelter's annual \$300,000 budget.

Phone 302-856-2246 or go to scchsinc.org for more information.

Apartments for mothers and children

Known as the Northport Transitional Housing Program, Crisis House owns five apartments and one house located near the shelter. The rental housing is available to single mothers with children for up to two years.

During that time, the mothers are required to work, repair their credit, take part in case management programs and keep their children in school. They pay rent of \$200 to \$300 and pay their own electric bills.

"This gives them a chance to stabilize themselves with a goal of working toward permanent housing," Morole said.

"We do the best with what we have. Most want to make it, but some will never be able to function living in a rental situation, and some actually like living the way they do," Morole said.

And there have been success stories. Working with Habitat for Humanity, three clients have built their own homes. Others have gone on to find good jobs, and some have started their own businesses.

AT A GLANCE

- In 2015, Crisis House served 96 men, 60 women, 29 children, and 22 people in the Northport transitional program

- Staff helped residents obtain 75 jobs and assisted 88 residents with housing