

Help is out there for single moms

By Sarah Lake
Staff Writer

GEORGETOWN — Like most mothers, Charlene McNeal wants to give her children the world.

"I may not have everything I need, but I always make sure they have everything they need," she said. "I'll go without."

The 42-year-old mother of two is the head cashier at Home Depot, attends school to become a drug and alcohol counselor, and is working on the sweat equity hours necessary to gain a house through Habitat for Humanity — all without the assistance of a spouse.

"I do the best I can," she said. "That's all I can do."

McNeal is one of many mothers in Sussex County who's raising children on her own.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 7.3 percent of women in the county are heads of household with children under the age of 18 and no

By the numbers

- 5,447 women in Sussex County have children under 18 with no husband present
- 1,377 men in Sussex County have children under 18 with no wife present

— Source: U.S. Census Bureau

husband present.

Marie Morale, executive director of Sussex County Community Crisis Housing Services, said her agency sees a lot of single mothers who require assistance.

"We offer transitional housing for single moms who are working and going to school ... trying to get their lives together," she said. "In our homeless shelter, we see a lot of women who have made bad choices regarding their domestic partners."

Morale said five to six women are currently in

the transitional housing program and roughly 35 single moms utilize the homeless shelter each year.

Kisha Jones, 27, lives in transitional housing with her 7-year-old son. She works full-time as a nursing assistant and is enrolled in the registered nursing program at Delaware Technical & Community College.

The hardest part about being a single mom is the exhaustion, she said.

"I work at night and go to school during the day," she said. "My parents help out with baby-sitting."

Jones hopes to move out of her transitional housing unit within the next year.

"I just have to get my credit cleaned up," she said.

Amanda Malone said the father of her 1-year-old daughter refuses to pay child support. Since she recently had back surgery and can't work, the lack of financial assis-

tance is taking its toll.

"I'm doing the best I can with the support of my family and the support of the state, but it's frustrating that I can't work," she said. "Right now, I'd do anything to be able to take care of my daughter on my own."



John King photo

Charlene McNeal, a single mother, puts her granddaughter, 17-month-old Amiya Needam, to sleep at her Georgetown home.

Moms

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Charlene Phillips, family services coordinator for Habitat for Humanity, said a majority of the families currently in her program consist of single mothers.

"It's a difficult and challenging situation to be in, but we are so happy to have the opportunity to help these families," she said.

The Habitat for Humanity program requires single mothers to become "partners" in their recovery process. Candidates must clear up all existing debt, take various courses and physi-

cally help build homes, Phillips said.

"We work with their situation the best we can because we know they're under a lot of stress," she said. "They're heroes ... they're champions."

Nadine Blades, an administrator at the Edward W. Pyle State Service Center in Roxana, said while the agency's services are available to anyone, she encourages single moms to utilize the center.

"My mother was a single mom, so I know what that was like," she said. "She was never aware of services available to her and it's wonderful to have centers and agencies that can provide assistance."

McNeal's son, Thomas

Resources

- Community Crisis Housing Services: 302-856-7524
- Edward W. Pyle State Service Center: 302-732-9501
- Habitat for Humanity: 302-855-1153
- Delaware's Helpline: 211

Boyer, 15, said he appreciates the sacrifices his mother makes.

"My sister and I are still trying to figure out what we're going to do for her for Mother's Day," he said.

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