

Program provides Fresh Start

By MARK SAGE

Published: July 6, 2010

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A woman and her two children moved into an unfurnished apartment after living at the Family Resource Center. A male resident at Crossroads Shelter was able to find permanent lodging.

While they – and many others – secured a place to live, they had no furnishings or the necessary items for keeping house. No programs were available to help them.

Because of the growing need to help displaced people moving into their own homes, Fresh Start was born last November. The program is designed to provide the basics of housekeeping to those who have nothing.

“A group of us ladies went out to dinner one evening,” recalled Ann Bowen, who was instrumental in starting the program. “We were friends and we had served on the Family Resource Center Board. We got to talking about how the ladies leave the center and have absolutely nothing to fall back on.”

Also helping with the program are Ann Laing, Holly Bockes, Brenda Aker and Brenda Cooley.

Based on programs that began in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the women developed a list of basic items a person would need to keep house. They included a coffee pot, toaster, hand mixer, tea kettle, set of silverware, set of dishes, pots, pans, skillets, trash can, trash bags, light bulbs, mop, broom, bedding, pillows, towels and wash cloths.

“Our next stop was storage,” noted Bowen. “We sent e-mails to friends and within 24 hours we had a storage facility donated by Bill and Farron Smith.”

Next, the founders contacted Andy Kegley, executive director of HOPE Ministries Inc. They were allowed to put their program under the agency’s domain so that tax-exempt receipts could be written to donors and checks could be handled through HOPE’s administration.

Monetary donations may be sent to HOPE Inc., P.O. Box 743, Wytheville, VA 24382 and be designated for the Fresh Start Program.

The agency should be contacted by anyone wishing to donate furniture or other household items.

According to Bowen, Fresh Start has helped eight families or individuals to furnish their homes either partially or completely. The program's supplies and funds are depleted as requests continue to grow.

The program's storage building at the Family Resource Center is empty except for one chair.

"We didn't realize what the need was when we started," Laing commented. "There is a definite need. It has gotten bigger than we ever thought."

She noted there is always a need for gently used items such as bedspreads, comforter sets, lamps, mattresses, couches, chairs, tables and other furniture. Other housekeeping items are needed, too, according to Laing.

Requests for Fresh Start services, Bowen pointed out, are screened by the Wythe County Department of Social Services.

Also needed are volunteers for the program. People to pick up donations of items and take them to the storage building or to distribute them are welcomed.

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