

Remodelers Come to Aid of Shelter for Homeless Boys

By: Adrien Strasbourg (Houston Chronicle)

Because there just wasn't enough space last year for a boy in need of a home, he was turned away. Later, alone on the street, the boy died of exposure.

The possibilities of that sad story repeating will be reduced thanks to a group of volunteers from the Remodelers Council of the Greater Houston Builder's Association.

The volunteers have partially completed the renovation of an old house used by Hope Shelter on Telge Road in Cypress. The Residential Treatment Center assists boys ages 12 to 17 to overcome adversities and teaches them how to function independently.

When finished, the Hope Shelter will be completely remodeled and expanded with a new wing.

"There was an old house on the property when they started the shelter and they outgrew it," said Tom Lammers of the GHBA Remodelers Council. "We (are) remodeling that house and adding a new 30-by-15-foot dorm wing that will house another 20 boys."

Much of the work was done in a single day as 40 to 50 volunteers gathered at the site May 18.

The group focused initial efforts on the floor, walls, roof, windows, siding and electrical features.

"It will take another couple of months to finish the project. A plumbing crew and others from the council were there," Lammers said.

It is estimated that the project would have cost well over \$100,000 without the donation of time and materials.

"We expected it to cost over \$100,000, and we could never have done this without this kind of help," said Sarah Walker, assistant executive director at the shelter. "This is a miracle for us. We will use it for an independent living place for those 16 and over (so they can) learn to live on their own. They will still have supervision but will live less restrictively.

"After they finish the program at the shelter, they can transition to the independent housing in the back. They can stay until they are 18 or, if they are in college, until they are 24. Now we have 24 boys at the shelter and with the (renovations), we can take another 20."

The shelter was started by Walker and her partner, executive director Seth Ahenkora, because of the needs she discovered in her 25 years with the Texas Department of Human Services.

"I worked with Child Protective Services and found a great need for treatment with adolescent boys ... We have a counselor on staff and we have a drug abuse program."

Walker said the facility renovations could not have been accomplished without the help from the GHBA volunteers and donations from companies.

Materials as well as manpower have been donated. McCauley Lumber donated the lumber; Hardi Corp. donated the siding; Gulf Coast Windows donated all the windows; and Cameron Ashley donated the roofing materials.

Lone Star Plywood and Door and Venetian Blind Co. also donated materials, Lammers said.

"We had several contractors who gave us estimates and they all came out far above \$100,000 and that is just for the renovations," she said.

The facility also needs furniture, washers and dryers, beds and bedding, bath linens, desks, computers, kitchen utensils, and tables and chairs, she said.

"We need things that will help these boys transition out on their own, like they would live in an apartment," Walker said.

The project began when Cypress United Methodist Church contacted Lammers about the problems at the Shelter.

Lammers took the project from there, and credits GHBA Remodelers Council president Chris Vamvakias with bringing the project to fruition.

"I am doing this because we are supposed to give something back," he said. "The council does at least one project a year. This is about the biggest one we have ever done.

"I have met the boys. They seem like good lads, all are going to school. These are boys who have been abused, thrown out and are just trying to get someplace.

"If we can help these boys, then I will be a happy man."