

Group home offers a break with the past

By Richard Lech
staff writer

For six developmentally disabled adults, it was a major break with the past.

After living all or most of their lives with their parents, they were moving out. On Nov. 12, the four women and two men took up residence at Redford Opportunity House (ROH), a new group home on Beech Daly just north of Six Mile.

"In the first couple of days, a couple of the clients were a little bit homesick," home administrator Larry Schmidt said. "But now they really enjoy the move."

"A few were looking forward to it because they knew they were moving away from mom and dad, sort of like going away to college, that sort of feeling."

"In some ways it's tougher on the families, who've had their son or daughter at home for years and years,"

said Gary Wheeler, executive director of the Community Opportunity Center (COC), a non-profit corporation that operates that home and two others.

THE HOME was financed through a Michigan State Housing Department Authority (MSHDA) mortgage. Operating costs are paid for through the residents' Social Security, Department of Mental Health or MSHDA payments, plus \$50 a day per client in state money.

It cost \$138,000, Wheeler said, which includes the expense of making the home barrier free to comply with federal regulations. For instance, the home has extra-wide hallways, special ramps, handicapped bars in the bathrooms and a ceiling of double-thick drywall for fire protection. One of the residents is wheelchair-bound.

The home is part of a continuum within the COC program, Schmidt said. ROH is at one end of the continuum, and a new apartment complex for the

developmentally disabled in Garden City, expected to be completed in the spring, will be at the other end. In between are COC's two other group homes, the Plymouth and Livonia opportunity houses.

The ROH residents don't have as many "everyday life skills" as the residents of the Plymouth and Livonia homes, Schmidt said. The idea is that they will perfect such skills as personal hygiene and being able to work independently so they can go on to the interim homes or perhaps straight to the semi-independent living of the apartment complex.

"Our overall goal is to provide the least restrictive environment as possible for them and to move them to more of an independent-living environment when they're ready," Schmidt said.

THE ROH residents range in age from 20 to 39. All have been living at home with their parents, although one has spent some time in an institution. "They all need direction right now,"

Schmidt said. "They all came from their homes, where their parents had a tendency to do more for them."

The residents have specific individual goals they are working on. They are learning to do their own laundry and some of their own cooking. A chart on the refrigerator spells out the household chores each is responsible for in a given week, such as taking out the garbage and sweeping the floor, wiping the tables and countertops, or washing the pots and pans and putting the food away.

During the day, five of the residents go to a sheltered workshop, the Northwest Workshop of the Wayne County Association for the Retarded, where they do minor assembly and factory work and some academic work.

The residents also participate in outside activities such as exercise classes, dances, swimming and bowling.

"We have tried to provide as many activities as possible, and it's good therapy," Schmidt said.



A group home resident enjoys a moment of solitude in the room she shares with another resident.

volunteers

The Oakland County Volunteer Bureau (OCVB) has a current file of volunteer opportunities for more than 200 agencies. Non-profit organizations needing assistance may list with the bureau. For more information about these and other volunteer openings, call the bureau at 642-7272.

SENIORS PROGRAM AIDE — Patient, caring, understanding individual, over 21, is needed by the Southfield Adult Day Center to listen to and converse with elderly and assist with letter-writing, crafts, lunch, etc. Tues. and Fri. 2 to 4:30 p.m.

ROLE MODEL — Oakland County Youth Assistance needs many volunteers to serve as role models and work with youth on one-to-one basis. Should be at least 19. Will supervise, listen to and become a friend of a child. Time flexible, but two to four hours per week. Also needed is a volunteer to become a working member of a

committee dealing with prevention of child abuse/neglect and delinquency.

COORDINATOR — City of Southfield needs persons with marketing/communication skills, over age 22, to work with Business Consortium for the Arts. Will coordinate performing/visual art and artists with business community for art experience at the workplace. Time flexible, weekdays.

LIBRARY CLERK — The Academy of the Sacred Heart in Bloomfield Hills needs someone who likes detail for light typing, filing, arranging books, etc. Time flexible.

COMPUTER ASSISTANT — Volunteers over 18 years old with experience on the Apple IIe computer are needed by Baldwin Public Library to assist in putting data on microcomputer for membership files and mailing list. Time flexible.

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