

Suburban Life

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Thursday, August 24, 1989 O&E

(F)18

The Glastonbury School

Getting the kids who are having a tough time back on track

By Loraine McClish
Staff writer

Deborah Knapp started The Glastonbury School with one student in Austin, Texas, and is willing to do that again, if that's what it takes, as she begins anew in Farmington Hills.

"My objective is to help children who are having trouble reading or having attention problems and are falling behind," she said.

"I don't like labels and I don't use labels. Labels are important because the public school system would never get any funding without them. But terms like dyslexia and learning disabilities don't enter our school's description because we can help those children who are marginal and have not been identified to qualify for any special classes.

"There are still some kids who fall between the cracks and the (public) schools can't provide for them all.

"I want to get those kids back on track.

"If you are not reading well, you are not doing well anywhere else," she said.

HOW THE Glastonbury School got its name tells a lot about its founder.

"I grew up on Glastonbury Street in Rosedale Park," Knapp said. "It was a wonderful street and I had a wonderful childhood. I want that same wonderful energy to be put back into the lives of these children."

Much of Knapp's work as a teacher revolves around self-esteem. "These kids are of average intelligence and they don't have an emotional problem. They are struggling

and falling more and more behind — they're having one failure on top of another — and I want to catch them before it gets out of hand," she said.

Most of the children who come to her are not happy children because school in general has not been a happy experience.

"My success comes with their smiles," Knapp said. "That is my documented success. When they begin to read at their grade level; when they are enjoying it; when they tell me they want to get back into public school."

KNAPP CARRIES documentation as to the success of her school from a host of public school authorities, educational councils and agencies in Texas. To the best of her knowledge there is no other school of its kind using the same specific techniques she uses. Her specializations are in reading, spelling and written expression.

The core of the language curriculum is Alphabetic Phonics, structured to teach the reading process. It consistently interrelates reading and spelling concepts while teaching handwriting. Overall it aims to help the student understand the English language.

"I have found children with attention and, or, learning difficulties to have had a great deal of success using the Alphabetic Phonics program," she said.

The school offers a full curriculum based on multi sensory methods. Its focus is to help children through a small student-teacher ratio (5-to-1) gain the skills and tools that will car-

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RANDY DORST/staff photographer

Deborah Knapp sets up shop for the September opening of Glastonbury School, an alternative program to formal education for children with reading difficulties.

Sanctuary

A handful of volunteers try to make it live up to its name

By Larry O'Connor
Staff writer

ACROSS A FRESH coat of gray paint, the black letters read: "For Homeless Women and Children."

The name sums it up, but if only it were that simple. Inside the cement block shell in the heart of the Cass Corridor on this Saturday morning are a handful of area volunteers who are trying to make the building live up to its name.

The Children's Sanctuary when, or if, completed will be a daytime shelter for homeless women and children. The place will provide a temporary base during the day to get their lives in order.

Many overnight shelters are closed to the homeless during the day, leaving them out on the street.

Plans at the children's sanctuary include having services such as job counseling and self-esteem enrichment courses. More importantly, it will give homeless mothers an address in order to enroll their children in school.

Sister Sue Anne Brorby of Plymouth points to the imaginary areas where these services would take place. Several real obstacles, though, stand in the way.

The group is short on supplies such as ceiling tiles, dry wall and insulation. Also staring them in the face is a \$3,119 insurance bill.

Perhaps the only thing the group hasn't been short on is commitment from its volunteers. What once was a pipe dream, through some caring hands could become reality.

"IT WAS one coincidence after another that led to this," Brorby said. "There has been a lot of determination... that's what got us this far."

The Children's Sanctuary has been a collection of short stories of people who, provided the right stuff when needed.

For instance, the Westland woman who got in touch with Darlene Feldman, a Farmington Hills resident, who is director of Detroit Cover-Up.

The woman asked Feldman how she could help the homeless. Feldman told her about the shelter and how it needed electrical work. The woman on the phone, Barbara Anderson, just happened to be married to an electrician and had a son who was one as well.



'He took the keys out of his pocket and handed them to me. He told us to use the building to store blankets and if we get funding, we could use it for the sanctuary.'

— Darlene Feldman
director of
Detroit Cover-up

Anderson called her husband's boss, Ray Litt of Litt Electric in Detroit, donated the material and eight people spent three weekends doing electrical work.

"I found it very ironic," Anderson said. "The guys from the shop — as soon as I asked — they were willing to help."

Then there was obtaining the building itself. Feldman delivers blankets during the winter months to people in the Cass Corridor. She would always pass a vacant structure that sits on the corner Cass and Selkirk.

Something struck her about the building, Feldman said. So she took down the phone number and called the owner.

WITH NO money, Feldman made an appointment with the man to discuss the possibility of renting the building. Then afterward she received a call from Brorby, who told her about an architectural group from the University of Michi-

gan. The group was interested in designing a structure for the homeless as a class project.

About nine people, including some people from U-M, met with the owner of the building.

"He took the keys out of his pocket and handed them to me," Feldman said. "He said, 'I don't like bureaucracy.' He told us to use the building to store blankets and if we get funding, we could use it for the sanctuary."

The owner of the building, who wants to remain anonymous, gave the group a three-year lease.

Such stories only makes those involved believe it is fate that the sanctuary will open. The need is certainly there.

Estimates vary, but it's said there are 30,000 homeless people in Detroit. Yet there are only 500 beds available.

A growing number of the homeless are women and children. Many of them don't go to shelters.

"The stories I'm hearing, I don't blame them for not going to shelters," Feldman said. "I heard about a woman in a shelter who was with her four daughters in bed. She woke up and found some derelict with his hand down the baby's pants. The women and children in the street are exposed to sexual harassment."

THE CHILDREN'S Sanctuary will be modeled after similar transitional living centers (TLCs) in Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia. The shelter would be the first of its type in Detroit.

A lack of money and supplies loom, though. The phone number for the sanctuary has been disconnected and volunteers can only work when they have the materials.

The major concern at the moment is the insurance bill, which would have to be paid for the sanctuary to open.

People like Vince Schikora of Livonia work with unfettered determination. Schikora is like many volunteers who became involved through the Livonia-based Active Friends of the Homeless (AFOTH).

"I know people need these things," said Schikora, who is retired. "It's a wonderful feeling, and it's exhaustive at the same time."

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