

Apartments give young women support for future

By TAYLOR STUCK Jul 26, 2017 Updated 2 hrs ago



Lori Wolfe/The Herald-Dispatch A ribbon cutting ceremony was held for the newly constructed Golden Heart Apartments on Tuesday, July 25, 2017, in Kenova.

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KENOVA - Before Heather found her way to the Golden Girl Group Home in Kenova as a teenager, the future did not look so bright.

As an infant, she was removed from her birth parents after living in a van with nothing but bread to eat and beer in her bottle.

She went into foster care and was eventually adopted. It was fine until her adoptive father began sexually abusing her at age 5. The abuse continued until she was 16.

"Every year it got worse," Heather said. "At 16, I finally told someone. My adoptive mother never knew. My last words to her were, 'Please believe me.'"

Her adoptive parents lost their rights and she was placed in the group home.

"I was scared," she said. "But when I arrived, I felt a peace about it. Golden Girl Group Home has truly changed my life and truly has helped me through a lot in my life. While being here, I found God and made him my savior. With God in my life now, I wouldn't be here in front of you, graduated from high school, about to attend college for nursing school in the fall, being as happy as I am now. The most important thing I found here was a family: my Golden Girl family and the family I found through church."

Heather will be among the first young women to live in the brand-new Golden Heart Apartments, where she will stay as she studies to become a nurse. The apartments will serve girls who age out of the group home but are still in need of support, while also allowing them the freedom young adults crave.

The 9,600-square-foot complex at 1205 Chestnut St. in Kenova includes five one-bedroom apartments, five two-bedroom apartments and a 24-hour support staff member apartment. It also has a resource center, providing a space for girls to study and relax together.

The apartment complex is a step in the direction of ending the cycle of abuse, neglect and poverty many of the girls face.

"For the mother that died of an overdose or the father that is in prison, we have their daughters," said Renee Harrison, executive director of Golden Girl. "We also deal a lot with homelessness here, probably also an off-shoot of the drug epidemic. Many of our girls were homeless For the homeless mom or dad that can barely take care of themselves, and certainly can't take care of their children, we have their daughters.

"Another thing that is very rampant here in West Virginia is mental illness, people dealing with bipolar or debilitating depression ... While some can take care of themselves, many can't even take care of themselves. We have their daughters."

The motto at Golden Girl is "Once a Golden Girl, Always a Golden Girl," and the apartment is just a continuation of that promise, said Marlo Long, vice president of communications for BB&T Bank, one of the sponsors of the apartment complex.

"Life is not fair, and when these girls turn 18 to 21, oftentimes they are thrown out of the foster care system without any support and they are left to their own devices," Long said. "Many of these girls without support find themselves returning to an abusive situation in which they left, becoming homeless or worse. This type of project is critical to keeping that promise."

For Heather, the apartment complex turns an already bright future into a brighter one, something she is gracious for.

"It's why I looked up the definition of gratitude," Heather said. "It unlocked my life. It did turn enough into more. It turned my denial into acceptance, my chaos into order, my confusion into clarity. It turned my house into a home. It turned strangers into friends. Gratitude sure does make sense in my life. It has brought peace for today and creates more than a vision for tomorrow."

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+2

Fundraiser to benefit Golden Girl Group Home



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