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Ministry gets gift that will keep on giving



Morning Journal/Jo Ann Bobby-Gilbert Josh Lytle, vice president of Family Care Ministries, expects this gate to open wide to those who need to feel welcome again as Family Care Freedom Homes become a reality.

EAST LIVERPOOL — At Family Care Ministries on Sixth Street, it isn't uncommon for people to make donations: After all, the facility operates strictly on donations and grants.

So, when a lady walked into the office recently and said, *“I’ve been praying and have something I want to give you, if you think you could use it,”* vice president Josh Lytle said his dad, founder and executive director Donny Lytle, wasn’t too surprised but was, as always, grateful to accept any donation.

That lack of surprise quickly changed, however, when his dad learned what the donor wanted to give their ministry.

“It was her house!” he said with a laugh. *“People give us washers and dryers. But this was her house.”*

The donor, whose name Lytle did not want to divulge at this time, is already a supporter of FCM and receives its newsletter, and after building a smaller home, decided to gift the ministry with her four-bedroom home and the five acres surrounding it outside Chester, W.Va.

It was not only the answer to the donor’s prayer but the answer to the prayers of those involved in the ministry, as well.

Since opening its doors downtown last June, one of the goals of the ministry — which offers those with life-controlling problems ways to overcome them — has been starting Family Care Freedom Homes.

The idea is to provide a safe haven, a crisis center, a place where people who have sought help can begin to learn how to restructure their lives.

This home and property, with room for bunk beds, office space, learning areas inside and outside, offers exactly that, and Lytle said there is enough property to add a women's facility in the future.

"A lot of calls I go on with the police break my heart. (Those in crisis) accept my message of hope, then I have to tell them to wait before I can get them into a facility. This will fix that," Lytle said of the property.

Not all of those people assisted by FCM are enmeshed in the criminal justice system, he stressed.

"Some are just reaching out for help. Some just say, 'I need to change.' Probably about half of the people reaching out are in legal trouble, and the rest aren't. They're just reaching out," he said.

He understands their hopelessness, having been there himself before getting his own addictions and life under control by completing the Teen Challenge program, with whom FCM has partnered in its endeavors.

Much of what will go on at the Family Care Freedom Homes will be modeled after the program that changed his life *"when nothing else helped,"* Lytle said.

Residents 18 years and older will attend class during the day, learning work skills, life skills and ethics training, etiquette and manners and Lytle said, *"Their days will be 100 percent scheduled."*

Working around the property will be incorporated into those lessons, he added.

The program is based on the premise of *"How do you change your life? You start by making your bed,"* he said.

"If they're willing to go to a long-term training center, they'll come here first for preparation to get clean, get any court or medical issues cared for, so they wouldn't have to wait on the streets. They would be going to class. It would be 30 days, like an induction period."

Those who cannot, for any reason, attend a long-term program could be in-house at the Family Care Freedom House as long as 90 days followed by six months of intensive out-patient care.

And, like the property itself, Lytle said the cost of each person's stay would be paid by donations and grants, as would the cost of operating the program, the staff and maintenance.

Asked how that is feasible, Lytle just smiled as he looked around at what prayer had brought and said, *"It only comes through Christ,"* adding, *"Even if we got to the place we could take insurance, that limits that faith. We get donations and support from all over. The attorney general supports us and is looking for grants. The city also put in for grants and I didn't even know it."*

Fundraisers are held, including a walk-a-thon and banquet in the planning stages.

He said FCM has actually been offered other homes but turned them down, saying, *"We just trusted in God, and now we have it."*

Looking out over the pond that lies at the rear of the property with a smile, he said he could envision walking with a resident who doesn't articulate well in a office setting, talking out issues as they throw a fishing line in the water.

At the iron gate that graces the driveway, Lytle said, it will someday swing open to *"welcome someone who feels utterly, absolutely hopeless, and we will meet them at the door and let them know they are worth saving."*

There will be no fences, no guards, and Lytle said, *"If you want to leave, there's the road,"* although he said if someone is on probation and leaves, that would be reported.

Some sprucing up needs done in the house to prepare it as a residential facility, and an indoor swimming pool will be covered for liability purposes and the room refashioned into a chapel and banquet room, but Lytle said, *"Hopefully, by summer, we'll have people in here."*

He said the public will be welcome to “*come take a tour, meet the individuals and see for yourself*” what the Family Care Freedom Homes are all about.

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