

■ COMMUNITY

One bridge to hope

Marion County Detention Center and the Dominican Sisters of Peace partnering in transitional home for women

By Emily LaForme

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Beverly Lee, chaplain at the Marion County Detention Center, vividly remembers a female inmate waiting in the jail's lobby after being released. She was a recovering drug addict, and she didn't know what to do or where to go next.

Lee offered to take her to a recovery facility, and she agreed.

"She said, 'I'll go get my things and call you for a ride,'" Lee said. "She overdosed a few hours later."

It's a tragic, yet common scenario for recovering addicts leaving the jail.

But, Lee wants something better for the women she works with at MCDC, and is creating a facility specifically for them once they are released.

"She had this vision for a facility where they can go after they leave the jail, instead of going back to the people, places, and things that they were around before," said Christy Carpenter, a volunteer. "This is a place where they can come and have some structure, where they can have counseling and be around people who love and care about them and help them get their lives back together."

One Bridge to Hope is the facility Lee has envisioned, which will serve as a transitional home program where participants will arrive directly out of incarceration and will stay for 90 days. During that time, they will attend classes and other workshops to learn valuable life skills, and explore job opportunities while recovering from addiction. After their 90 days are up, these women should be able to reenter the world with a better chance of success, Lee said.

"While incarcerated, they detox, and become drug free and tobacco free," she said. "The fog lifts. They start to come out for Bible studies and you see the glimmer of hope, that maybe there is a better way. They express a desire to be able to change, and a willingness to go into treatment. However, when they are discharged, because there is no safe, healthy place for them to go, they go back to where they had been living. Without a safe place and structured program, relapse is inevitable."

The Dominican Sisters of Peace (St. Catharine Motherhouse) have partnered with One Bridge to Hope, and are providing a dorm and facility space for the program, charging a symbolic dollar

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a year for rent. “There’s a lot of hope there,” Carpenter said. “There’s a lot of beauty in those ladies and lot of promise. They are honestly some of the most intelligent ladies I have ever met. They have to be, to survive everything they have had to go through. This is a chance to get them turned around and put back into society to use those traits for good.”

Several volunteers have come together to help support One Bridge to Hope to see it make it off the ground.

“We all have that desire and see the need for this so much,” Jeannie Mattingly of Springfield said. “Addiction has affected every single family that I know. It’s hard not to be affected.”

Marion County Jailer Barry Brady is also very supportive of the transitional home.

“My primary goal is the detention center, of course, but reaching out for outside resources in the community is just as important,” Brady said. “You can’t fix individuals with just doing a six-month certificate program and assume they are going to be fixed.”

Brady said he doesn’t think many people understand addiction, or how much of an issue it truly is.

“Addiction is a real challenge,” he said. “We don’t understand it as a society for what it is. We don’t understand their ability to not say no, their attraction to get back into it, and their fight

on a daily basis to stay away. If we do not reach out for welcoming arms and faith-based entities who want to assist with part of the re-establishment and reentry into society, I don’t know how we can combat this.”

Volunteers at MCDC believe Brady’s understanding of the complexities of addiction is why such positive things are happening at the detention center.

“A lot of people that volunteer feel the same way that I do, that there is something very special happening in your jail, Barry Brady,” said Carpenter. “A lot of the people that work for you go to my church and feel the same thing.”

Sister Mary Terence ‘Terry’ Wasinger also believes in the good the transitional home can bring.

“I know that the need to help these women is so great,” said Sister Terry. “It’s pulled on my heart, and I knew we had to try. We have facilities locally for men, but nothing for women. We are so grateful that we have an opportunity to try to offer help and a place in this community to do that.”

Sister Terry and Lee met two years ago and began partnering in making the transitional home a reality. Sister Terry began researching everything she could about addiction on top of what she already has studied as a nurse.

“Some of my studies have been on addictive substances and opioids,” said Sister Terry. “The reason addiction is such a big issue is because there is a physical change in the brain from addiction. It’s so hard for a person to make



Photo by Emily LaForme

Volunteers and supporters of One Bridge to Hope, a transitional home for women recovering from drug addiction, met at the Dominican Sisters of Peace (St. Catharine Motherhouse) on Nov. 30 to tour and discuss the facility. The team behind One Bridge to Hope presented Sister Barbara Sullivan, coordinator of the Motherhouse, and Sister Mary Terence “Terry” Wasinger, a symbolic \$1 check for the rental space. Pictured, from left, are Sister Barbara Sullivan, Sister Terry Wasinger, Jeannie Mattingly, Mitchell and Brenda Wheatley, Beverly Lee, LaTonya Bridgewater, Christy Carpenter and Marion County Jailer Barry Brady.

it just with willpower. They need much more retraining, and my studies show that it takes at least two years to regain that.”

Lee said when it comes down to it, these women have so much potential for something more out of life.

“There are so many hurting women out there that need to be reached,” she said. “Women who want out of the circumstances they’re in, but don’t know how or where to begin that process. “We can provide a program designed to be a safe place,

drug, alcohol and tobacco free, where a woman can live while she learns about the ways of God and focuses on personal change, freedom from her past, to embrace the present and to be excited about her future.”

One Bridge to Hope still

needs \$20,000 to pay for renovation costs at the facility. Lee said she hopes to have the transitional home open by the spring.

For more information, or to help support One Bridge to Hope, contact Lee at bev@onebridgetohope.org.

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