

Marin Independent Journal (San Rafael, CA)

February 1, 2004

Section: Marin

Marin Services for Women finds new home

Jennifer Upshaw, IJ reporter

After a two-year search, **Marin Services for Women** has a new home in a former convalescent hospital in Greenbrae - a move that allows the nonprofit organization to double the number of women it serves. Staff and clients at MSW, which is celebrating 25 years of offering drug and alcohol treatment to women who have suffered trauma, recently moved into a 26,400-square-foot space at 1251 S. Eliseo Drive.

The move from Larkspur House on King Street allows the group to expand its residential and outpatient programs to 40 women and 10 children and consolidate with administrative offices that had been at 444 Magnolia Ave.

The agency has a lease with an option to purchase its new center. It will continue to lease the space on King Street for long-term transitional housing.

Officials set out to transform the institution into a place that felt like home, Executive Director Ann Harrison said.

"Virtually all of our clients are chemically dependent women who are survivors of some sort of trauma," she said. "There's a lot of research that shows a warm, clean, welcoming environment supports therapeutically the process of healing."

The new building includes an inner courtyard, a garden, individual and group therapy space, a children's outdoor play area and a separate outpatient section.

A large commercial-sized kitchen will be used for on-site culinary vocational training.

Carpeting discounts, design services, furnishings, beds, paint and other necessities to spruce up the building were donated by a variety of groups.

The largest donation, which covered the renovation's construction costs, came through a \$261,500 grant from the Marin Community Foundation.

"I think the foundation really understands that supporting women in recovery is really about community development and supporting the community as a whole," Harrison said.

Marin Community Foundation President Thomas Peters said the hope was to help the group continue its service to the community.

"MSW has a long track record of expertise and caring - they have literally made the difference in thousands of lives in the past," Peters said. "We are investing in that same prospect for the future."

But achieving such goals is challenging as California's budget crisis continues to pummel nonprofits, Harrison said, leaving such groups still struggling despite its successes.

"We've achieved that goal now and it's a major resource to the community - it's doubling the resource to the community right at the time that we are very vulnerable when the government funding is shrinking totally," she said. "It's really a Catch-22."

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