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New shelter provides fresh start for women

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COOS BAY - Jessica Weekly had run out of places to go.

The 22-year-old single mom left a bad marriage 10 months ago and tried living at her mother's and her aunt's places, but neither worked as a stable home for her 2- and 3-year-old boys. She had no job and owned no furniture, save for a small collection of ornamental roosters and some kitchen supplies.

Now, Weekly lives in a brand-new two-bedroom apartment, complete with all new appliances, a couch from the Salvation Army, a donated recliner, a twin pillow-topped mattress for her and a bunk bed for the boys. The boys share the bottom bunk. Weekly doesn't want to risk either of them falling.

Life is good at Coddington Place, the new women's shelter in Coos Bay. At the last emergency shelter Weekly lived in, the boys were rambunctious and disruptive, she said. Now that they've got their own place, they're quiet and calm.

And there's no deadline to move out. Coddington Place is permanent housing.

"It's awesome," Weekly said, as her boys in rubber boots rode toy bikes around the courtyard outside. "I love it. I've been stress-free since I moved here."

Stress was hard to find at the 10-unit center's dedication ceremony on Friday - though in the five years it took to raise money and build the \$2.1 million facility, that wasn't always the case.

A project of the local nonprofit Women's Safety and Resource Center, the idea emerged as volunteers and staff members recognized that they had much more success with women who



established a relationship with the center. They were less likely to return to their abusers or develop drug or alcohol habits, Executive Director Judy Moody said.

"We were sheltering women for just short periods of time," Moody said. "How can women make real changes in their lives in just 10 days, or 30 days?"

The center partnered with the Umpqua Community Development Corporation - another nonprofit that raises money for affordable housing - and started looking for sponsors and available land.

"We didn't want a shelter," Moody said. "We wanted apartments."

What they got wasn't easy. The property the center bought was across the street from Southwestern Oregon Community College, an ideal location.

But there was a problem, explained Chris Christopher, an Umpqua development corporation board member.

"There was a house sitting there," Christopher said during the dedication. "Betty (Tamm, the corporation's executive director) got all excited and demolished it before she had permission to do so."

As it turned out, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development wanted Coddington Place's developers to prove that the house wasn't livable before it could be torn down. The issue took several months to resolve, Moody said.

But the creators of Coddington Place wouldn't be daunted. One board member rode a bicycle across the country to raise money for the center. In the end, the center's board and the development corporation found 17 different funding sources and enough money to open.

That's welcome news to women such as Jessica Weekly. She's dating a guy that she stayed up all night drinking soda pop with a few weeks ago. Neither of the two drink or do drugs, she said.

"There are nice guys out there," Weekly said. "You just have to find them."

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