

Boys' home gets \$2,000 for furniture

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SPRINGFIELD - Boys will be boys.

And in their rough and tumble world, furniture does not always have a long life-span.

Sandra E. Johnson, director of the White Street Group Home for Boys, has learned that lesson first-hand while running the house that eight young guys call home.

"If we bought furniture out of our budget, it would take away from something else that they need," Johnson said, reflecting on broken dressers and bunk-beds bearing carved initials.

The program, a division of Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps, often looks to local businesses to acquire items that cannot be squeezed into their slim budget. One of these gifting groups, the Massachusetts Association of Realtors, recently secured a \$2,000 grant for the agency, money that will be spent on new bureaus.

"We are very concerned about housing issues," said Kevin M. Sears, president of the Realtor Association of Pioneer Valley.

"The fact that this home provides a safe place for these boys to live makes it a compelling cause for us to support."

The boys' home is a place of constant transition. As many as 10 boys, age 9 to 13, share the six-bedroom, two-bathroom house on White Street. Some are taking a break from a more independent life in a foster home, while others are making their way into foster and pre-adoptive homes from a more restrictive group environment.

"They are absolutely grateful to receive donations," Johnson said from her office inside the renovated two-family home.

"Then when they donate their time to the community, like volunteering at the soup kitchen, the cycle teaches them values that they'll carry through their whole lives."

Their residents, Johnson explained, were abused, neglected, or basically exposed to trauma somewhere along the line. Most come from partner agencies such as the Department of Youth Services and the Juvenile Courts, Department of Social Services and others. Though the furnishings are tired, and life can be a bit chaotic, theirs is a home of friendship, self-improvement and fun. Video games, taco night, basketball and field trips are all incentives for good behavior.

Cash for entertainment is used to instill life skills on weekend trips to volunteer at Red Gate, a 60-acre working farm, and on outdoor skill classes that teach rock climbing and boating. Johnson said that not much remains for new books or a basketball.

"We have enough money to meet their basic needs," she said. "This is to raise their quality of life and get them some of those extras that other kids have."

Some of the items needed include books, new unused linens, comforters, pillows, towels, any sports equipment, art supplies, DVDs, snow pants, winter boots, video games, exercise equipment, decorations, posters and residential beds. Larger necessities include carpeting and kitchen cabinets.

Anyone interested in donating items can contact Johnson at (413) 731-9140.