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'An idea whose time has come'

By *PATRICK MEIGHAN* Staff Writer

NASHUA – To sum up the importance of a new treatment center for alcoholic and drug-addicted pregnant women and mothers of young children, Cynthia Day turned to the words of someone as unknown as the many people whose lives may be turned around there.

Day shared the quote on Friday morning during a "baby shower" to introduce and collect donations for the Cynthia Day Family Center, which is run through the Keystone Hall program. Day is a recovered alcoholic, motivational speaker and longtime volunteer at Keystone Hall.

"An idea whose time has come is alive with the presence of the soon-to-be delivered child," Day said, quoting an anonymous source to about 70 people gathered at Harbor Homes at 45 High St.

"This certainly is an idea whose time has come," Day said of the treatment center.

The center will open within a few weeks at 440 Amherst St., a site which is now transitional housing for homeless U.S. veterans. The veterans who lived there are moving into the newly dedicated Dalianis House on Factory Street.

Because children can live with their mothers while the women undergo treatment, the family center provides a service that had never been offered before in Nashua and one that's rare in New Hampshire, officials said.

One place that had offered a similar program is the Odyssey Family Center in Canterbury, which is now closed.

Christine Cote credited that center with saving her life, and said the Cynthia Day Center will do the same for others.

Two years ago, Cote was four months pregnant and living and using drugs on the streets of Manchester. While in jail, she applied to the Odyssey Center and was admitted after she was released.

"I needed to be able to go away to a place where I could have my baby and also begin to get well," an emotional Cote said, reading from a letter she had written about her experience.

"You see, at this point in my life, I had become tired. Tired of the life I had made for myself and for my son. I was exhausted physically and emotionally. I just couldn't keep going on."

Through the counseling and parenting skills classes, Cote was able to land on her feet and make a home for herself and her son, and to bring an older son she had given away back into her life full time.

"I look back now at my experience there, and all that fills my heart is the utmost respect and gratitude for the women who helped save my life," Cote said. "Because now, my life is one that I never imagined that I would have."

Likewise, Day said she was grateful for the help she received recovering. At 37, she was vice president of a company that supervised medical facilities, Day said. She burned out, got divorced and reached a point where she was drinking "morning, noon and night," leading her to becoming homeless and getting arrested in Maine, Day said.

Counseling, "God's grace" and the support of programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous led her on a path toward recovery from addiction and eventually to a "ministry of healing" as a psychiatric nurse, Day said.

She has volunteered at Keystone Hall for more than 20 years.

"What you are looking at is a lot of hard work, the love of God and the beautiful people that you are," Day said to the audience of mainly Keystone Hall and Harbor Homes staff members.

The center is being funded through a \$420,000 state grant, said Annette Escalante, vice president of Keystone Hall, a treatment center for men and women who suffer from substance abuse.

It will start small, offering 18 beds for the women and children up to age 6 who will live there for as long as a year, Escalante said.

The former veterans housing won't be the center's permanent home, she said. Harbor Homes, the parent organization for Keystone Hall, is now raising money to renovate a building at 615 Amherst St. that officials hope in a year or so will become the new home for both the center and for Keystone Hall, which is now located in the Millyard.

Cash and donations such as toys, strollers and baby supplies were collected at the shower. Escalante said Keystone Hall officials hope to make the shower an annual fundraiser.

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