

## Shelter Finds A Home



By Tracy Farnham | The News Herald

Eighteen months ago, David Collins and his wife, Kathy, started a missionary journey. They didn't leave their home and travel to foreign lands, but rather they became missionaries at home providing shelter to those without any.

"We need to flesh out the gospel in much more than our speech. We felt we could no longer preach the gospel. It's time we live it," Collins said.

Since then, Collins has been on a mission to provide a facility to the homeless, a shelter for their stormy season of life. Recently, House of Refuge ministries acquired a building through a private donor and just this week hung the sign above the door that will open to homeless persons in Burke County, giving them a temporary place to call home while they transition back into the world.

"We offer them unconditional love that they're not use to and that knocks down all kinds of barriers and many types of strongholds," Collins said.

The ministry is as much about rebuilding relationships, he added. "At the bottom of almost every situation is a broken relationship. Broken lives begin with broken relationships," Collins said.

The idea is to get them back to their home church or back to their families.

"Seventy-three percent of folks don't go back to the woods they go back to their family, HUD housing or a treatment program," he said.

The current facility housed 57 individuals this past year in just two bedrooms with an average stay of 12 nights, Collins said.

Homelessness in Burke County can have many different causes and only 38 percent is related to substance abuse, according to last year's Point in Time count, Collins said.

"When you paint homelessness with a broad stroke it dehumanizes," he said. "Every one is somebody's husband, brother or son, he added.

"These are our friends, relatives and it could just as easily be you. Without having at least three months salary put back, a car accident or illness is how close every one of us walks that line," Collins said.

In addition, the current facility Collins provides two apartments and the Mudloff family will move in one next week.

"If it wasn't for this place a lot of people wouldn't be able to get on with their lives," Traci Mudloff said. Her husband, Mark, was hospitalized at Duke University

Far left David Collins, executive director, watches as the sign is hung above the future House of Refuge homeless shelter. Mark Mudloff and CJ Lane hang the sign as Traci Mudloff holds the ladder and Steve Laws looks on.

Hospital, while she stayed with family in Newland and their three children in Puerto Rico. Next week they will move in as a family.

Mudloff became unemployed while fighting a terminal illness, but is helping Collins with renovations.

He said, "I want to devote whatever time I have left to volunteer for this community."

"We want to help the people who have helped us," Traci added.

Collins said his desire for the shelter isn't to warehouse people. From his past experience working with a homeless shelter in New Orleans, he said, "The challenge here is to still capture some of the warmth of the family atmosphere that we have at the current facility."

Floor plans for the new location include a home-like environment with a living room sitting area and kitchen, along with bunk beds to house up to 14 persons and separate quarters for a resident manager.

On Tuesday evening the monthly roundtable was held at the new location for House of Refuge on Murphy Street to give supporters an opportunity to see the building. Training will be held Thursday for those who would like to volunteer for the annual count of the homeless in Burke County which will take place on Jan. 29.

Last year 150 homeless people were counted, Collins said. With unemployment up in Burke if trends follow Collins anticipates the need for helping services to increase. Physically counting the homeless allows grant monies to be obtained toward a homeless ministry.

Collins is hopeful for community support. "This ministry can serve as an ongoing mission work for church groups," Collins pointed out.

He's ready to go to work and is looking for volunteers to help. Collins said a few unexpected expenses have come up, including installing a sprinkler system along with water lines and a fire hydrant, but once a building permit is acquired renovations can begin. "I'm ready to talk to building groups or mission groups," Collins said.

"We are missionaries to homes that nobody sent us to. We actually put our lives on the line and we want to be Christ for these people," he added. "We are living to reach these folks and we're happy doing it and we've never been more at peace."

Churches can call 403-6515 for information or visit [www.refugeministries.us](http://www.refugeministries.us) to print the Homeless Ministry Handbook on ways to help with this ministry.