

Mobile home program helps county homeless

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Maryrose West doesn't remember the date her husband left, or the date she became homeless, eventually living for almost nine months on a friend's back porch.

The date she does remember is Feb. 3, 2006. That's when Christian Help moved West into a

refurbished mobile home.

Now, 18 months later, West is the first graduate of Christian Help's mobile home program.

She has dreams of opening a transitional home for other homeless people in the county and has written a handbook for people in the mobile home program.

Christian Help Inc., a group that helps with utility bills, pays

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Maryrose West is the first graduate of a Christian Help Inc. mobile home program that aims to help get homeless or near-homeless people back on their feet.

● Program

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for temporary shelter and refurbishes mobile homes for the homeless or near-homeless, is graduating its first group of people from the mobile home program.

Now, the organization is looking at ways to keep members involved after the program with volunteer work and how members can give back to the community, executive director Pam Leffler said.

"They are very willing to give back and help each other," Leffler said. "We are finding ways to empower them."

West began giving back before graduating Friday, Leffler said, and decided to write a handbook for future mobile home program members.

The handbook has definitions that give an in-depth explanation of the Christian Help rules, such as a prohibition on drinking alcohol.

"When I first entered the program, I was the type of person that, if you give me an inch, I'll take a mile," West said. "Now, I

know I don't want to take advantage of it. I would lose everything."

Members of the mobile home program must live in their mobile home for 18 months, achieve personal goals and attend support meetings with other mobile home residents.

The support West received from others in the program helped her stay dedicated, even when times were rough and she felt like leaving, she said.

"It's like a family. You can choose to be part of the family or stand on your own," West said. "And let me tell you, you won't get very far on your own."

A case worker and Leffler helped West create a budget and learn more about finances. Four hours on a Saturday morning set the ground work for West's budget, and individual sessions kept her on track.

Even when West wasn't sure where she would live or what would happen, she kept her job in Indianapolis, where she has worked for 12 years.

When her car broke down, West paid a co-worker to take her to and from work, and some co-workers donated furniture when West received her mobile home.

Christian Help has 12 families in

mobile homes now, and another three homes ready, Leffler said.

Now that people are finishing the program, Leffler would like to see the mobile home program expand and take members into the next stage in their lives, she said.

"The home they receive does not increase in value, and that bothers me," she said.

Leffler would like to move graduates into larger mobile homes or to homes that will build equity, she said.

The mobile homes graduates leave behind could be used as a down payment on a new home, and then the mobile homes could be used by new members in the program.

West would like to find a building where she could open a transitional home and help homeless people in Johnson County.

A two- or three-story home with a garage would be perfect, she said. People could live in rooms upstairs, and the garage could be used to repair people's cars, learn skills to become an auto mechanic or wood worker, and also use the main level to help people learn social skills and get job training, West said.

"This way, people can come in

and gradually grow in a six-month to a year program," she said. "Then they could transition into the mobile home program and become self-contributing."

West has come a long way from the days she would curl up with her cat, Little Girl, in the winter to keep warm or melt in the summer heat while she was homeless.

Graduating from the program isn't the most rewarding part of the program, she said.

"My defining moment was when I was able to pay the rent and had money in my savings account, and I did that," West said.

Graduation almost didn't happen for West. She thought of leaving the mobile home program in June to move in with a friend, which would mean lower rent.

"I realized, if I did this, I would be giving in to my fear, and I wouldn't be finishing the program," West said. "I didn't want to fall back into the same patterns."

Giving back to Christian Help has already started for West, who wants to become a case manager and helps put files together for the organization.

"Graduating is just the icing on the cake," she said.