

Renovated Sanctuary House enhances a valuable service

Ribbon-cutting held at crisis shelter for women, children

By **VELVET SPICER**

A teddy bear dressed in a tutu sits on a windowsill, waiting there to welcome a little girl who one day soon will occupy the room.

The room is one of many at Sanctuary House, an emergency shelter for women and children that recently underwent substantial renovations in order to increase the number of people it serves. Its location is a closely guarded secret in order to protect the women and children inside.

"The little chill we experience when we're outside is a vivid reminder of why we need shelter like this," Marlene Bessette, CEO of Catholic Family Center, said last week at a ribbon cutting for the home. "Sanctuary House has been with us since 2002, and over the course of that time tens of thousands of women and children have been served and gone through these doors."

In 2016, Bessette noted, nearly 1,000 people were sheltered in Sanctuary House, 40 percent of whom were children.

"What happens in the shelter is not only warmth and food and a roof, but it's also access to case management services and to our partners at the county and the city," Bessette added.

The Rochester facility, operated by CFC and licensed by the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, or OTDA, underwent a \$1.7 million renovation that included enhanced privacy, improved heating, plumbing, window sealing and insulation infrastructure, a new roof, as well as an increase in the number of beds from 43 to 47.

CFC worked with Plan Architectural Studio P.C., Hamilton Stern Construction LLC, the Dormitory Authority for the State of New York and consultant Monica McCullough,



Photo by Velvet Spicer

Marlene Bessette, CEO of Catholic Family Center.

of MM Development Advisors Inc. on the project.

The project offers safe and secure overnight accommodations designed to meet trauma-informed-care best practices. Trauma informed care recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients and responds by integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices.



Photo by Velvet Spicer

Officials take part at the opening of the newly renovated Sanctuary House.

"The expansion of the number of beds, the improvement for handicapped accessibility and trauma-informed approach here at Sanctuary House is really going to help provide those services to the women and families that need it most," said state Assemblyman Harry Bronson, D-Rochester. "Homelessness is a real tragedy and Sanctuary House really provides that temporary home so that people can then focus on other things and move forward."

State Assembly Majority Leader Joe Morelle, D-Irondequoit, also was on hand for last week's ribbon cut-

ting. As a former board member of CFC, Morelle said one of the things Bessette taught him through their work together, particularly with the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative, was the importance of trauma-informed services.

"People who are in crisis often are fragile, have many challenges, but oftentimes their lives have been touched by some type of trauma, and we need to be sensitive," Morelle said. "That's one of the great things about Sanctuary House, its commitment to providing services for women and children who have been touched by trauma."

"To be able to go to a place you call home, that's your refuge, that's your place, is so important to the development of children," Morelle added.

CFC runs a similar program at Francis Center. In operation since

County, so you are truly making an impact in the lives of people throughout our community," County Executive Cheryl Dinolfo said at last week's ribbon cutting.

Dinolfo also proclaimed Jan. 25 as Catholic Family Center Sanctuary House Day in the County of Monroe, "in recognition of your dedication to supporting women and children in our community in building strong and healthy lives."

Carol Wheeler, who serves as director of housing for the City of Rochester, said the community was blessed to have CFC.

"When it comes to the things that are taking place in Rochester as it relates to the homeless and providing service to them, Catholic Family Center is always right there to lend their expertise and their support," Wheeler said. "And they get results."

Sen. Joseph Robach, R-Greece, said Sanctuary House was "a great usage of public resources."

"This one is very simple, both in terms of compassion and need. We certainly have enough resources in this state and in this community that nobody should have to be homeless, especially women and children," Robach said. "Hopefully, working together, we'll make sure nobody falls through the cracks at any time."

Sanctuary House offers women and their children case management services that include intake and assessment, service planning, information and referral and follow-up, as well as three nutritious meals a day and an evidence-based parenting program. Weekly, on-site health care and substance abuse and mental health referrals also are available at the home.

"I am so happy today to reopen Sanctuary House," said Lisa Lewis, who serves as vice president of crisis and stabilization services for CFC. "This is a site that's dear to my heart. All of my shelter programs are dear to my heart. They're my babies."

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1991, Francis Center provides around the clock, on-site emergency and transitional housing services for men. The OTDA-licensed emergency program has a capacity of 38 beds with an overflow of nine additional beds for inclement weather.

CFC's ultimate goal is to help clients and their children find stable and safe housing.

"For the County of Monroe, the Catholic Family Center facilities, both (Francis Center) and Sanctuary House, are the top two temporary housing facilities for all of Monroe