

Overwhelming demand for expansion doubles the size of Dottie's House



Dottie's House is using a recent \$450,000 grant from the state to help fund the approximately \$1.6 million cost of construction of nine new apartments similar to this existing one.

(STAFF PHOTOS: MICHAEL SYPNIEWSKI)

By **TRISTAN J. SCHWEIGER**
TOMS RIVER BUREAU

For women in abusive relationships, getting out is rarely as simple as just leaving.

Perhaps the most obvious obstacle is the fear and threat of violence. But even once they do leave, these women, many of whom have had their confidence and self-esteem destroyed by years of abuse, require counseling and other aid in getting back on their feet.

Since 2001, Dottie's House has been providing that aid to victims of domestic violence. And the transitional housing facility has filled such a pressing need that often there's simply no room to shelter additional women and children.

"We were turning people away," said Carol A. Wolfe, founder and vice presi-

dent of Dottie's House.

That's why the current expansion at the shelter's undisclosed Ocean County location is so important, Wolfe said. The shelter is adding nine new apartments, which will more than double its current size.

Dottie's House is using a recent \$450,000 grant from the state to help fund the approximately \$1.6 million cost of construction. Work began on the new apartments earlier this year and is expected to be completed around Christmas, according to Wolfe.

In addition to providing housing to victims of domestic violence, one of the key aims of Dottie's House is to help women there become self-sufficient. In abusive

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HOW YOU CAN HELP:

■ Dottie's House is constantly seeking support from the local community. To learn more, people can contact Homes Now, Inc., the Brick-based nonprofit that oversees the shelter, at (732) 295-7380. The Homes Now office is located at 2141 Route 88 East, Suite 1, Brick, NJ 08724.

■ IF YOU NEED HELP: Providence House Domestic Violence Services operates a 24-hour hotline. (732) 244-8259 or (800) 246-8910.



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ON THE WEB: Visit our Web site, www.app.com, and click on this story in the Ocean section for a link to Homes Now.



Joe Campos, maintenance manager at Dottie's House, surveys the construction of one of the nine additional apartments being built. (STAFF PHOTO: MICHAEL SYPNIEWSKI)

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relationships, the women often have been prevented from holding jobs or from controlling their own finances, and consequently need to learn decision-making skills, according to shelter officials.

The idea is that women who come to the shelter will stay no longer than two years, and in the meantime must have jobs or attend school.

"You're kind of stuck a lot of times in relationships with the person," said one resident who wanted to remain anonymous for safety reasons. "A lot of times you're stuck because the husband or the other person is the bread-winner."

Even if the woman did have a job prior to leaving the relationship, the same financial concerns that affect many New Jersey residents are an obstacle to independence, say domestic violence experts. Affordable housing is an issue throughout much of the state, and having only one income makes finding adequate housing even more of a challenge, they say.

"Women who are victims of domestic violence have many barriers and obstacles that keep them in an abusive situation, and affordable housing is one of them," said Jean Metz, service area director for Providence House of Ocean County.

Providence House, which provides a safe house to women escaping domestic violence for up to 60 days, will often refer women who need transitional

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housing after that period to Dottie's House. Metz said the number of women requesting help from Providence House has doubled since 2005, so the expansion at Dottie's House will be a definite help.

Another goal of Dottie's House is to prevent future violence by educating and counsel-

ing the women's children as well as the women. Deb Galletta, Dottie's House's director, said children who grow up in abusive environments are much more likely to become abusers themselves.

"We have a four-year-old (at the shelter) who is already very violent, very aggressive from what he's seen in the first four years," Galletta said. "It's a cycle."

In addition to having access to counseling, the women at the shelter also act as a support group for one another.

"It is definitely a blessing. It is a wonderful program," said the anonymous resident.

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