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PREGNANT AND PARENTING TEENS PROGRAM: Help is waiting at St. Jude's Ranch

Live-in facility in Boulder City aims to provide skills

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Tim Cashman, center left, Gard Jameson and Family Court Judge William Voy take part in a ribbon cutting Saturday for a home for pregnant and parenting teens at St. Jude's Ranch for Children. Photos by Jason Bean/Review-Journal

The welcome mat is out, the paint is dry and the staff is ready.

All that's missing are at-risk teens who are pregnant, parenting and looking for sanctuary and guidance.

After a year of preparation and a ceremonial ribbon cutting Saturday, the St. Jude's Ranch for Children launched its Pregnant and Parenting Teens Program and live-in facility at its Boulder City campus.

The program aims to give pregnant or parenting youths between 10 and 17 years old parenting and life skills, therapy and health care assistance.

To St. Jude's Ranch chief executive officer Christine Spadafor, the high teenage pregnancy rate in Nevada speaks volumes to the need for such a program.

"Research shows that seven out of 10 teen mothers who have a child will have another within 18 months without intervention," she said. "This program is that intervention."

On Saturday, the communal living areas and 10 suite-style bedrooms were ready for their future occupants, who are slated to start moving in next week.

Staffers continue to select who will be chosen from a waiting list of youths recommended by the Department of Juvenile Justice Services and Nevada Division of Child and Family Services.

Two teens on the short list include a 13-year-old who is 22 weeks pregnant and another teen who has a 3-month-old baby. Once in the program, the mothers are responsible for their child at all times and must attend the local high school, which, Spadafor said, makes this effort unlike other live-in programs.

The facility also will have a 24-hour staffer, who will live in the facility with the mothers.

That person, 27-year-old Latishia Martin, sat on one of the beds in one of the sun-filled rooms Saturday and spoke about her hopes for the program.

"It's necessary to have that positive, stable force," she said of her role. "We want (the girls) to become positive role models for their children so they won't continue the cycle."

She said the facility will be a safe place for the mothers and their children but schedules will be followed and chores assigned. The girls can stay until they can transition into independent living or are 20 years old.

Crews worked for about a year revamping the St. Richard's Inn building on the campus and final touches, such as hanged pictures in the living room and vibrant bedspreads in the rooms, were added this week.

"This is my home as well, I want it to be homey as well as healing," Martin said.

The program is funded through donations and grants and each girl will receive assistance with health care and living costs. Before the building received a blessing Saturday, Spadafor noted it was a "true team effort" by everyone who stepped up to lend their service or support to the project.

"It's time to start to heal and give new life," she said.

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Christine Spadafor, chief executive officer at St. Jude's Ranch for Children, talks Saturday about the facility's new program, which offers support to pregnant or parenting youths.