



Unity Care Group, Inc.
"Creating Healthier Communities"

Media Contact
Development
Department
Unity Care Group, Inc.
(408) 971-9822

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Young Lives in Transition

Salinas, Calif., (November 13th, 2003) - Young adults who are too old for foster care but have nowhere to go will soon have a new place in Monterey County to call home.

Unity Care Group, a foster-care agency based in San Jose, unveiled a new home in Salinas on Wednesday as part of its Transitional Housing Program. It is the first of its kind in Monterey County, said Felicity Ayles, the group's publication and office coordinator.

"This is a stepping stone for kids to go from the foster-care system to being self-sufficient," Ayles said.

The program is aimed at helping children in foster care who "age out," meaning they turn 18 and no longer qualify for assistance. Six former foster-care recipients between the ages of 18 and 21 will live in the home, along with two house monitors. They will receive job and education assistance as well as independent living skills.

Unity Care is in the process of finding people to live in the Salinas house.

Two similar homes in San Jose have served a total of 25 residents since the THP began three years ago, with about 60 percent of them completing the program, according to Andre Chapman, CEO of Unity Care Group.

"These kids have no place to go; they're stuck. The day they turn 18, they get an eviction notice and they are told that by law they are adults," Chapman said. "But we all know that an 18-year-old is not necessarily an adult, and they may need some assistance getting up on their feet."

According to a Monterey County census study on homeless youths, at least one in four children who have been in foster care end up homeless within three years of their 18th birthday. That number alone warrants the need for more assistance programs similar to the THP, according to Bruce Campbell, senior analyst for the county Department of Social Services.

"There is a desperate need for this, because if you're growing up in foster care in Monterey County and you turn 18, you're on your own," he said. "We're not trying to play bleeding heart. This is reality."

Residents in the program receive employment and school assistance, counseling and financial planning advice, as well as independent-living skills that vary from opening a bank account and getting a driver's license to setting short- and long-term life goals.

All residents are expected to hold down jobs and are required to give a minimum of 10 percent of their salary toward rent. All the money is given back to them upon completion of their program goals, Ayles said.

Marquita Whitted, 20, of San Jose, entered the THP when she turned 18, after nearly 12 years in the foster-care system. She said the program allowed her to save money to get a place of her own. She now works as a preschool teacher and takes courses at a community college.

Being in the foster-care system meant she never knew what a family home structure felt like, until she participated in the THP and received support and care from her home monitors.

"For me, it felt like home," she said. "I never experienced home life, so to have the mom and dad figures, it was cool."

The four-bedroom home, in the 1500 block of Partridge Street, was built by the Community Housing Improvement Systems and Planning Association as part of its Moderate Income Housing Program. Unity Care Group got a deal on the

house -- about \$150,000 off the home's \$350,000 market value -- after Campbell put them in contact with Alfred Diaz-Infante, president and CEO of CHISPA.

"We both benefit. We provide a need and we're able to partner with a nonprofit," Diaz-Infante said. "And we provide this home at a below-market price. Otherwise, they would have to raise a lot more money for it."

ABOUT UNITY CARE GROUP

Founded in 1992, Unity Care Group, Inc. is a community-based non-profit multi-service youth and family development agency. Founded with the goal of developing educational and social programs to enrich the lives of at-risk youth, our mission is to provide quality youth and family programs for the purpose of creating healthier communities through lifelong partnerships. For more information contact the Development Department at (408) 971-9822 or visit us at www.unitycare.org.

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