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COPE to open new home serving recovering mothers

By Thor Jourgensen / The Daily Item

LYNN - Project COPE has purchased a former Johnson Street nursing home and plans to convert it into a temporary home and substance abuse recovery center for women with infants.

St. Jean's Credit Union, Lynn Housing Authority and Neighborhood Development and private donors are helping COPE pay for the project.

The home will have a large living and dining area, large kitchen and multiple bedrooms that will each house only 2-4 residents, a library with computers, office space on each floor to increase access to staff and private space for meetings.

COPE has been planning the 66 Johnson St. renovation for two years, said COPE Director Mark Kennard. The building has been vacant for four years.

Once the renovation is completed, Kennard said women will be able to live in the Johnson Street residence for up to a year and receive services including pre- and post-natal care, parenting skills, vocational training and family reunification.

"The early stages of the process of recovery from substance abuse and life traumas require providing a safe and stable living environment," Kennard said. "This new facility will allow us to provide clients with the tools needed to increase the likelihood they will achieve success and maintain a drug-free lifestyle after completing the program."

Established in 1970, COPE opened a residential substance abuse treatment program for women in 1985. In 1993 it provided beds for pregnant and postpartum women to decrease risks resulting from substance abuse during pregnancy and to support women in the early stages of recovery while bonding with their newborns.

The existing women's home at 117 North Common St. also houses COPE's offices. Kennard said most of the beds are located in the basement in a dormitory-style arrangement that offers little privacy and creates an institutional feel.

"The new facility will provide a significant upgrade to the space this program currently has," he said "It will have much more of a home-like feel to it."

Kennard said Lynn Housing Authority and Neighborhood Development played a vital role in project planning.

"However, the project could not have moved forward without the support of St. Jean's Credit Union who stepped in and provided the key piece of funding to make this project a reality. St. Jean's has been serving Lynn for 100 years and certainly understands the needs of the community," Kennard said.

If a woman is not emotionally or financially ready to live independently the new facility will offer an interim placement on the third floor. It will be less structured than the residential program she has just completed but more structured than other housing, providing additional time and support she needs to ensure a successful reintegration into the community while maintaining her recovery.



From left, Mark Kennard, Executive Director, Project COPE; Charlie Gaeta, Executive Director, LHAND; David Surface, President/CEO, St. Jean's Credit Union and George Piperidis, Olde Town Construction Co., are pictured in front of 66 Johnson St. in Lynn

Kennard said 66 Johnson's renovation will not only benefit COPE's clients.

"This will improve the quality of the neighborhood, increase property values and lower crime rates," Kennard said.
"This is a positive development for COPE, the neighborhood and the city. We could not be happier."

The Johnson Street project is scheduled to be completed by late fall. COPE is still looking to raise \$50,000-\$75,000 in additional funds to help support the purchase of furnishings and appliances.

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