

SACRED HEART HOUSE

Single moms find stability, a way forward with nonprofit



Melissa Hulett at her apartment in Jefferson County on Oct. 24. Hulett went through Sacred Heart House's transitional housing program for single moms. After two years she was able to get her own place. HYOUNG CHANG — THE DENVER POST

By Aldo Svaldi

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Sacred Heart House of Denver helps single moms and their children put a roof over their heads. But it has a much broader mission — helping women stand on their feet again so they can pursue a new path in life.

“Sacred Heart House is a self-sufficiency program for single moms with kids and single women experiencing homelessness,” director Janet Morris said.

The nonprofit, founded by Catherine Bevanda in 1980, obtained its name from a convent that had closed near the Sacred Heart School in the Five Points neighborhood.

For years, the former convent operated as an in-house shelter, until that shut down during the height of the pandemic.

The nonprofit, which is a recipient of a Denver Post Season To Share grant, provides emergency housing support in area hotels, along with food and guidance in accessing assistance programs.

Case managers at Sacred Heart counsel women on skills such as parenting and budgeting. They help stabilize the families they work with, providing furniture and household goods, and other forms of help that extend long after the initial emergency.

For women who are pursuing a degree or a vocation, the nonprofit provides a transitional housing program in six condos that it owns in south Denver for up to two years.

“We want women going to school,” said Sheri Ludlam, a transitional housing case manager with the Denver nonprofit.

For Melissa Hulett, Sacred Heart House was a place to turn when she ran out of alternatives in May 2022. Hulett survived two abusive marriages and found herself living with her parents after a car accident left her unable to drive or work as a nurse.

A less-than-ideal environment turned volatile after her father and nephew had an altercation.

Hulett found herself couch-surfing with her daughters in a half dozen places until she found Sacred Heart House.

The nonprofit placed her in a condo in south Denver for the next two years, allowing her to obtain counseling, go to school and eventually find her own place.

“It gave me the room to do what needed to be done to provide a better environment for my daughters,” said Hulett, speaking from an apartment in Jefferson County, where she and her family moved this summer.

The nonprofit keeps rents at 30% of monthly income, freeing up enough money for participants to attend school or develop a vocation, Ludlam said. And it provides a support network to help make it happen.

The program taught her the life skills needed to make better choices and allowed her to pursue training in a new field after her injuries closed off nursing, Hulett said. She has become a better parent, and her daughters are learning with her, helping break generational patterns, she added.

Ten to 20 single women reach out each day, a demand that exceeds the small nonprofit's resources, Ludlam said.

When Sacred Heart House can't help, say in cases of domestic violence, it tries to connect people with other groups that can.

It remains one of the few programs providing long-term assistance to women who want to make a permanent change, giving them a safe space where they can rebuild their lives. And Hulett's goal one day is to be able to help other women who find themselves in the situation she did.