

# Home run for COPE

## Women's program to get new facility on Johnson Street

BY PAUL HALLORAN

Many women who participate in Project COPE's women's residential treatment program are pregnant, but it was those who staff the program who felt like expectant mothers during a tour of the new facility that is under construction.

Project COPE is in the process of completely renovating a building at 66 Johnson St. that formerly housed a nursing home. When completed this fall, the building will be home to the women's residential program, something that excites program director Ashley Brooks and her staff.

"This will have much more of a home feel to it," said Brooks, who has been directing the program since February. "It will be a significant upgrade to the space we currently have."

The women's residential substance-abuse treatment program is currently located on North Common Street in a building that also houses COPE's administrative offices. Most of the beds are located in the basement in a dormitory-style arrangement that offers little privacy and creates more of an institutional feel. That is about to change.

"We've always been able to provide the tools, now we will have great space to work in," said counselor Christine Leavitt. "We will be able to do more work on an individual basis, and help women to start to reconnect and bond with their family."

The new building will feature a kitchen with an island-style set-up, allowing for conversation and bonding among the women in the program. There will be a library and meeting space on each of the three floors, with computers available. Most importantly, there will be private bedrooms with no more than four to a room.

The new space will also offer private interim placement housing on the third floor for women phasing out of the program. The overall capacity will be 24.

"A lot of our clients didn't grow up in families," Brooks said. "Some were homeless, or had addicted parents. They

never had the opportunity to live and work as a family unit. That is something we try to provide, and the new facility will be very conducive to that."

The residential treatment program for women in recovery from drug and alcohol abuse was opened in 1985 and, eight years later, beds for pregnant and postpartum women were included to decrease risks resulting from substance abuse during pregnancy and to support women in the early stages of recovery while bonding with their newborns.

Women can enter the program while pregnant or with children up to three

months of age. These women and their babies may remain in the program for up to a year – twice as long as the normal stay – receiving a range of services including access to proper pre- and post-natal care, parenting skills, vocational training, and family reunification.

Services offered as part of the program include counseling, alcohol and

drug education, job training and planning, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings and recreational activities to provide structure and encourage individual responsibility.

The staff includes five full-time case managers, three overnight counselors and two volunteers.

"The new facility will allow us to provide women with the tools they need to increase the likelihood they will maintain a drug-free lifestyle after completing the program," said Project COPE Executive Director Mark Kennard.

Project COPE was established in 1970 to provide accessible services to individuals coping with substance-abuse issues. Over time, the types of services provided have expanded in response to the changing needs of the community.

The renovation project is being led by Olde Towne Construction of Lynn, with financing from St. Jean's Credit Union.

For more information about Project COPE visit [www.projectcope.com](http://www.projectcope.com) or call 781-593-5333.



The staff at Project COPE's Women's Residential Program includes, from bottom right, director Ashley Brooks, Alyse Couture, Fatima Doyle, Christine Leavitt, Karina Levesque, Terry Palardy, volunteer Joyce Breault and Chiqita Velma.

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