

Transition House offers living quarters, help for people dealing with serious mental illness

- By Joy Hampton Senior Staff Writer
9 hrs ago



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Joy Hampton / The Transcript (September 14, 2016)

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While many families were preparing for the holidays, John Smith (not his real name) had given up hope. Alone and depressed, he took the only action he believed would end the enduring pain — he tried to end his life.

“I went into Griffin Christmas Eve of last year,” Smith said. “I tried to commit suicide, and I thought that was the only way out.”

Fortunately, Smith learned there was another way, a second chance at life with help from Transition House.

“Since I’ve been here, I’ve grown and I’ve opened up with a lot of stuff I’ve kept to myself all my life,” Smith said. “Once you’re in, you’re family.”

The Transitional Living Program at Transition House helps adults with serious mental illness as they move from in-patient treatment to life back in the community.

That passage starts with supervised apartment living and the development of life skills, vocational skills, socialization and recreational skills.

“There’s three people per apartment. I think it works,” Smith said. “One of my roommates is a DJ and likes doing DJ work. My other roommate was in the military. I was the truck driver for 30 years.”

The Transitional Living Program has four apartments with a maximum length of stay of one year, during which time Transition House staff provide intensive support for recovery from mental illness and co-occurring disorders such as substance abuse and addiction.

Through a combination of counseling and life skills education, mental health is addressed at the root, enabling clients to successfully move from transitional apartments to their own homes. Untreated mental illness can result in addiction, crime, homelessness, poverty and health issues, said Executive Director Bonnie Peruttzi, who recently celebrated 30 years with Transition House.

“We really do save people’s lives,” Peruttzi said. “Every single person here knows we’re invested. We care.”

Clients are assisted in obtaining basic necessities such as clothing, hygiene products and food prior to receiving Food Stamps and CART bus passes. Each person in the program has an individualized recovery plan that defines goals and a path through the recovery process. That includes outreach after they transition to life on their own.

“When you walk through the door, they’re all about helping,” Smith said. “I like the way this place works. The only thing they ask is that you come to the meetings, make the groups, participate and try to better yourself.”

Smith plans to stay connected after his own transition.

“I didn’t know there was a place like this,” he said. “I will come back and try to give back.”

The United Way of Norman funds programs at 27 local nonprofit organizations. The United Way and these agencies work together to create lasting community changes in Norman, Noble and southern Cleveland County. For more information or to give to the United Way of Norman, visit UnitedWayNorman.org.