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By Jay Meisel

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PORT ST. LUCIE - Typical of the families moving into a new apartment complex is a woman with four children who live in a car.

The woman works, but can't afford housing, said Schonna Green, executive director of M.I.S.S., or Mothers and Infants Striving for Success.

With a grant from Port St. Lucie and help from businesses, Ms. Green and volunteers last week put the finishing touch on Sammy's Landing, an eight-unit complex.

Each unit has two bedrooms and will house two families. Fifteen women and 30 children will initially occupy the apartments, Ms. Green said.

Residents will be allowed to live in the complex for up to two years, she said.

"Our goal is for them to help themselves," she said.

M.I.S.S. will provide them with classes and information about resources to help them to better manage their finances and to be able to afford regular housing.

Ms. Green formed the organization in 1999, saying she felt there was a need to help single women with children. A \$7,000 grant from the Hobe Sound Community Chest helped her get started with Martin County's first homeless shelter, she said.

She said she believes she benefited from growing up in a household with two parents.

"I wanted to give every single woman the opportunities I had," she said.

Among those helping to accomplish that goal last week was "Nancy," who did not want her real name used.

Nancy said that in 1999 she was required to perform community service. She chose M.I.S.S. as the venue to do that.

She performed 50 hours of community service with the organization and found that "very inspiring," she said.

A couple of years later, she said, she faced being evicted from her residence and turned to M.I.S.S. for help.

She said she lived for a short time in a transitional living center run by M.I.S.S.

Then she started a part-time job and became a part-time student at Indian River State College, she said.

Now, Nancy said, she lives in her own residence in Martin County.

"It gave me empowerment to become self-sufficient," she said.

M.I.S.S. plans to open another apartment complex in Martin County later this year.

At Sammy's landing, the families will move into fully decorated and furnished units, thanks to businesses and volunteers.

Wal-Mart Corp., through its distribution center in Fort Pierce, donated kitchen appliances and flatware.

Several employees from the center helped install the appliances.

Discount Furniture of Fort Pierce donated other furnishings for the apartments.

Volunteers from Crossroads Community Revitalization of Orlando, which also helps the homeless, helped prepare the apartments.

The complex will include a multi-purpose center, on-site staff and security and a play area that will be constructed by the Port St. Lucie Women's Group.