

Martin County's first homeless housing facility opens its doors

By Cathy Reeder Correspondent

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STUART — MISS Butterfly Gardens on Tuesday opened the first homeless housing facility in Martin County, a 20-unit apartment complex to house 34 women and up to 70 children.

The facility will accept residents from Martin, St. Lucie or Indian River counties, thanks to funds from state and federal sources. It is a partner in the Treasure Coast Homeless Services Council.

The MISS. concept is to give **mothers** and their children a community of support, said MISS Executive Director Schonna Green.

"This has taken blood, sweat, tears, and everybody's help," she said.

MISS stands for **Mothers** and **Infants Striving** for **Success**, and the ground rules at Butterfly Gardens allow each woman to stay up to two years as long as she works, goes to school to improve job skills, helps run the facility and attends mandatory trainings.

Residents do not pay rent at the facility, which opened Oct. 1. Instead, they pay a \$300 monthly "program fee."

Lynnette Simmons, who moved into her two-bedroom unit with toddler Genesis on Oct. 1, said the rules are an easy price to pay for the chance to get on her feet and build a good life for her daughter.

"We have a nice place to live, and it is family-centered. The **mothers** all have each other, and the children have each other to play with," she said. "It's our own little community.

"So there is a curfew and mandatory meetings and things you have to do. Once you reach a certain age, once you have a child, you don't want to party all the time, and you don't want to just hang around. You want to build a good life for your child.

"Here they help you do that. They help you be self-sufficient. If you don't have a degree, they show you how to get it so you can afford to live on your own and take care of your family on your own."

John Lex and Joe Rivera are truck drivers from the Walmart distribution center in Fort Pierce. With six other drivers, they assembled the donated beds and planted the landscaping and hung the curtains — “whatever they asked us to do,” Lex said.

There were also three special volunteers who belong just to the children at Butterfly Gardens — Angelika Watkins, 58, Ernestine Clark, 74, and Kay Moore, 52.

“We are the grandmothers, and we take care of the children every Monday, Wednesday and Friday when they come home after school,” Watkins said. On-site child-care staff and other **mothers** take care of the children the other two days.

“We give them snacks and play with them, and listen to their day. We put their report cards up on the board and discuss their schoolwork and do activities with them.”

The grandmothers were proud to report that every child in Butterfly Gardens made As on the report cards that came home this week.

“That’s what happens when you give a child a place to sleep and a sense of belonging,” MISS board President Sylvia Taylor said.

To Donate

Call: (772) 781-4063

Visit: MISS Butterfly Gardens, 4434 S.E. Cleckley St , **Stuart FL** 34997

Online: www.missinc.org/howyoucanhelp

How to get help

Homeless **mothers** with children in Martin, St. Lucie or Indian River counties are eligible to stay at MISS Butterfly Gardens.

Call (772) 781-4063.

Visit the facility at 4434 S.E. Cleckley Street, **Stuart**, Florida 34997 (in Port Salerno, behind Murray Middle School)

You can obtain a Client Intake Form online at www.missinc.org / contact us.



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