

Jesse's House Progress March 2007
By Adlen W. Robinson

Forsyth County is certainly blessed to be home to Jesse's House. This special facility is a non-profit organization that was created because some concerned citizens, as well as the Cumming/Forsyth Council on Youth saw the need in the county for an emergency shelter for girls.

Jesse's House serves high-risk girls between the ages of 7 and 17. Although the goal of the shelter is to provide a safe haven for girls in crisis until an appropriate placement is found, the ultimate goal is to re-unite the girls with their families.

Martha Lappe, a board member and active volunteer with Jesse's House, said the home-like feel of the shelter is no accident. "It was very important to the board that Jesse's House look and feel like a home for these girls," said Lappe. After outgrowing the original shelter, Jesse's House now has a new home in Cumming. "The way the entire community came together to raise money to renovate our new shelter was truly an amazing thing to witness," stressed Lappe. In fact, an anonymous donor donated 100 K, with the stipulation that Jesse's House could have the money if they could raise another 100 K to match the funds. "There was a tremendous outpouring of assistance from all over the county," said Lappe. "Even when we hired people, they always gave more of their time and in most cases of their money to make the project come to fruition." Local churches, civic groups, businesses, and individuals all stepped up to the plate and had a hand in the project. Lappe explained that various groups and families would "adopt" rooms in the shelter and raise money to decorate and furnish them. "People were here all the time---painting, repairing, replacing things---everyone wanted to take part in not only making this shelter happen, but also making sure it was the nicest facility it could possibly be," said Lappe passionately.

To tour Jesse's House is like touring someone's home. There is a game room, a spacious family room with a large wide screen television, a cozy library complete with computers which the girls can use for homework or recreation. There is a laundry room, large bathroom, complete with several showers. Perhaps the best feature of Jesse's House is the incredible kitchen. Granite countertops and wood cabinets, both of which were donated to the shelter, are accented by beautiful tile backsplash and floors. The kitchen is complete with a huge walk-in pantry and a large dining table that enables the

girls to all eat together. On one of the refrigerators, the chore chart is posted, showing each girl what her expected chores are for each day. Out back, there is a large fenced in yard, a patio with a grill, as well as a beautiful garden—planted as a gift from the Forsyth County Master Gardeners.

Although the shelter's pantry was bulging with food, Lappe said they always have needs. "We want to encourage people to donate whatever they can---right now, during the holidays, gift cards are always welcome," said Lappe. "The holidays can be particularly hard on the girls that do not get to be with their families---any donation is most appreciated."

The shelter provides a safe haven for up to 12 girls at any given time. Once admitted to the shelter, each child's case is reviewed by a multi-disciplinary professional team. A plan is then developed that will meet each child's medical, psychological and educational needs. Currently, Jesse's House has 4 full time employees and countless volunteers who give freely of their time to help ensure the shelter's success. "These girls are basically starved for attention---we want to ensure them that they are important and that their lives matter," said Lappe.

Besides helping the girls cope with their current situation, Jesse's House also strives to teach the girls life management skills and household responsibilities. "We want the girls to be successful in their lives," said Lappe. "By teaching them to be responsible for keeping their rooms clean, helping cook dinner, having good study habits---all of these are skills they need to have and many do not when they come here."

Julie Barry, the Executive Director of Jesse's House, said measuring the success of the shelter is easy when you observe the girls the shelter serves. "When we see these girls laugh and smile---enjoying life, that is how we know we are doing our job," said Barry. "That happiness comes from being in a safe and loving environment with people who genuinely care for them---it is so important for these girls to know that people in the community truly care about them and their situation."

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP JESSE'S HOUSE:

- Volunteering time to assist the staff in the direct care of the residents.
- Volunteering time to assist the administration staff.
- Volunteering time in the upkeep and maintenance of the facility.
- Joining one of the fund-raising committees.
- Donate needed goods and/or gift cards (call for a specific list);

- Participate in the Adopt a Child Program.
- Become a Corporate Sponsor and include your employees.

For more information about Jesse's House or to volunteer, please call 678-947-6217.