

Center opens new housing for domestic violence survivors

Apartments on Second Open

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Ben and Sonia Ruiz of La Camara, a community social services center, look over a new unit at the grand opening of expanded housing at the Center for Women and Families, 927 S. 2nd St. on October 7, 2011.
David R. Lutman/Special to The Courier-Journal

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Mary O'Doherty, is project director.



Beth Workman, of the KY Domestic Violence Association, looks through the window of one of the new apartments.

PHOTOS BY David R. Lutman/Special to The Courier-Journal

The Center for Women and Families has a new tool for helping those recovering from domestic violence.

On Friday the center officially opened new apartments for domestic violence survivors on its Second Street campus, with a ribbon-cutting attended by U.S. Rep. John Yarmuth, D-3rd District.

The 22 units are expected to house about 40 people, who can occupy the apartments for three years as they transition to full independence, said Marta Miranda, the center's president and CEO.

The two-story apartments are an expansion of the center's services. In the past, clients could secure apartments through the center, but they are spread through the Louisville area and occupied for months instead of years, Miranda said.

The units are spacious, allowing the tenants to live more comfortably as they go to school and participate in the center's programs, Miranda said. The units also are energy-efficient and are equipped with appliances and alarm systems, according to a news release from the center.

The families will live on their own, but the Center for Women and Families' office is only yards away, across a parking lot.

"How many single moms are able to afford a safe apartment like this?" Miranda said.

One of the first tenants, Karyn DeJohnette, said she'd been ensnared by domestic violence through much of her life.

She lived in the center's shelter after being homeless, is studying culinary arts at Jefferson Community and Technical College — and now has a new home.

"I mean, it's brand new," DeJohnette said. "It's overwhelming when I walk into this brand-new place."

The units were built through a partnership among several agencies and nonprofit groups. The Kentucky Domestic Violence Association organized the development of the apartments, which are among 48 such units in cities throughout Kentucky, said Mary O'Doherty, the project director from the association.

The Louisville project cost \$4.17 million, according to a news release from the center. It was funded through tax credits, federal grants and low-interest loans through the Kentucky Housing Corp.

All of the units have been assigned, Miranda said.

Tenants are responsible for part of the rent but also receive housing vouchers from the Louisville Metro Housing Authority, O'Doherty said.

The tenants will be eligible for the center's Economic Success program, which involves financial education, counseling and other services, the center said.

Having safe, affordable, quality housing is an essential element to fighting domestic violence, O'Doherty said.

"For most survivors of domestic violence, the need for safe, affordable housing is what keeps her in the relationship," O'Doherty said. "She knows her standard of living is going to plummet when she leaves him, because she's financially tied to him."

She said the new housing units will provide a reasonable option for some of those survivors.

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