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## **Haven Home: a place for the community's youth in need**

Because Jessie Dry has been a foster child he knows what it feels like to be suddenly taken from what he knew and put some place strange and unknown, he and his wife Lacey have committed to becoming the house parents for Haven Home. Lacey is the assistant principal of the Will Rogers Middle School.

Haven Home was created as a project of Partners for Ottawa County Youth (POCY) in the effort to provide boys 13 to 18 years old a short term, safe, secure, but temporary home. Jessie is committing to the project full time.

Jessie said he and Lacey have always wanted to become foster parents since they were married and talked about it even when they were dating. Jessie was placed in foster care at a young age and has always dreamed of helping other kids.

"I lived in a foster home when I was a little kid. I had a really good experience," Jessie said.

Lacey said that his experience made him want to foster children and she shares that mission.

When Elaine Clugston, who serves as the coordinator for Haven Home and the chairperson of the committee formed by POCY to work on the project, heard that the couple were interested in becoming foster parents, she knew this was the perfect match. The Drys agreed to become the house parents for Haven Home and provide a home or shelter for four boys. They live in the country with horses and cattle, making a perfect setting for Haven Home.

"We want to work with them and help them be successful and return them to their home so they be successful in their environment," Lacey said.

The Haven Home committee met weekly to develop the details of the concept, create guidelines, and get the project up and running. The Committee was comprised of Elaine Clugston, John Depoe, Robin McSpadden and Beth Rotman.

Depoe has been with OJA for over 24 years, McSpadden is the director of ROCMND Youth Services, and Rotman is with POCY, Clugston is a long time community advocate for youth.

"We're starting with a boys home and we're trying to fund the program with local funds and donations," Rotman said.

With the help of local businessman and community leader Terry Jurgensmeyer helping to raise funds for Haven Home and financial support and advice from the Wyandotte Nation, the Miami Nation, the Seneca/Cayuga Tribe and Service Solutions the project has a start.

"Judge Reavis had asked that I get involved in helping put this thing together in the beginning of it. Really it's a program I believe in, the Jurgensmeyer family believes in. We want to give back to the community, it's helped us and we're part of the community and I think it's vitally important to Ottawa County," Jurgensmeyer said.

"Our tribe always want to be a partner with the community. The community does a lot for the Wyandotte Nation and supports our businesses, and anytime that we have the opportunity to give back we want to do so. There's no better

cause than the youth of Ottawa County. We want to make an investment in the youth and we feel like this would be an opportunity to do that for us," Chief of the Wyandotte Nation Billy Friend said.

"You know Ottawa County has ten recognized tribes, and a lot of tribal youth fall into categories such as this. It's kind of a chance for us to change their life, and we'll always participate. This goes along with our tribal priorities, education and services are our tribal priorities. It's so needed. It's unfortunate in today's life that both parents are working and there are a lot of single families that need the help, so if we can give them a good break we will help," Chief of the Miami Nation Tom Gamble said.

Rotman said the project is impossible without these generous supporters for whom the group has great appreciation.

"Lacey and Jessie don't have kids, so setting up and funding the home is quite a project and it's expensive to purchase things such as beds, bedding and towels, we really are hoping for community support from churches, businesses, and individuals," Rotman said.

Without the support of the community the Drys said they would not be able to make a successful endeavor. More funding and continued community support for Haven Home and other projects is needed to sustain and to meet the urgent and pressing needs of the community's youth.

According to Rotman the nearest facilities or shelters for youth are in Tahlequah and Claremore. The hope is to expand the project to house more youth, and eventually open another home for girls.

McSpadden said the previous shelter that housed youth was closed about two years ago due to lack of funding and leaving the community without any place to temporarily house youth.

Ottawa County District Court Judge Robert Reavis was instrumental in pushing for the home.

"With less and less funding for services we have to address some of these issues at a local level. We were running out of options. I mean you'd have a kid that was out running out of probation and we have send them to a lock down facility for a violation, that's not appropriate. These lock down facilities are for kids that commit very, very serious crimes. And so you run out of the proper consequences for the act," Reavis said.

Judge Reavis stressed how great the need is here in Ottawa County for Haven Home. He said this type of shelter will be more efficient and cost less to run and he is confident that the Drys will be the right people to run the home.

We have a responsibility to do a better job of educating and disciplining out youth, it becomes more important every day and we have fewer and fewer resources. It's a double edged sword and that's why I appreciate the tribes kicking in on this and members of the community," Judge Reavis said.

Haven Home will accept referrals from youth, families, schools, law enforcement, the Department of Human Services, the Office of Juvenile Affairs, the courts and other agencies or individuals. Placement will be based on a case by case basis serving Ottawa County youth or runaways found here.

Clugston will take all referrals, process them, and serve as case manager for the youth placed at Haven Home.

The youth placed in Haven Home will generally stay from 10 to 30 days for intermediate care. "After that we'll be looking for another place for them to stay or for them to stabilize to be able to move back home," Clugston said.

The home will assess and provide for the youth's needs, including keeping them in their own school. Rotman gave examples of the youth that might be placed at Haven Home such as truancy cases that the parents need help with, or possibly kids that the judge thinks would benefit from time there that may have juvenile charges. Plans are to have the home up and running as soon as possible, hopefully in the next few months.

“Sometimes I think about Haven Home and it’s hard to describe exactly what it will be because it can be so many different things based on the needs of the individual, for some it will just be a shelter, for others it may be kind of a treatment home. It allows itself to be more individualized,” Lacey said.

“Our goal is when these youth come, when they leave they be in better shape than when they came,” Rotman said.

“For however long we have these kids, it’s home,” Lacey said.

Anyone wanting to donate to the Haven Home project should contact Elaine Clugston at 918-541-0742 or Beth Rotman at 918-533-4904 or there is a fund set up for the project at Welch State Bank for Haven Home.