

Linden House Closes after 20 Years of Service

The two-story house at 815 North 7th Street looks very much like other residences in Boise's North End neighborhood. A rocking horse is tucked neatly in a corner of the porch and a large linden tree shades the front yard. But a closer look suggests that this home had a special purpose. A faded note under the doorbell lets inquirers know that the house is open 6 pm to 9 am. There is also a special night doorbell for those who arrive after the residents have gone to bed. And, until recently, there was a small sign above the door which read "Linden House."

These signs provide a clue to the purpose of the home that served for over 20 years as a shelter for women and children in Boise. Linden House is closed now, but even during its many years of operation, it was not widely known that the converted parsonage provided emergency housing services. According to Laressa Struwe, a member of the Board of Directors for 12 years, Linden House was a low profile agency by choice to protect its clients. Over the years, the home has been a haven to women and children who were battered, stranded, or didn't have any place to go.

The idea for an emergency housing service in Boise for women and families was conceived in 1975 by a group of concerned members of Immanuel Mission Parish, a Methodist church formerly located in Boise's Hyde Park neighborhood. The group recognized that housing for single men was available at the Boise Rescue Mission, but that there was no centralized unit in Boise to provide emergency housing for women or women with children or families.

From the beginning, Linden House was an ecumenical effort. The Immanuel Mission Parish members enlisted the support of other congregations and proposed setting up two emergency housing units which were both former parsonages. An apartment located in the back of their church was used to house couples and small families, and the Immanuel Lutheran parsonage, which later became known as Linden House, was used to house primarily women and women with children. This initial group of volunteers decided that the emergency

housing would be temporary—approximately a five- to seven-day stay—and that efforts would be made to find clients a more permanent residence after this time. They drafted articles of incorporation and named their agency Emergency Housing Service (EHS). Congregations that were charter members included Immanuel Lutheran, three Methodist churches, Sacred Heart Catholic Church and Congregation Beth Israel. Other charter members were Idaho Legal Aid, the Boise Women's Political Caucus, and Volunteers in Corrections.

At the time EHS was founded, Linden House was referred to as the Center and had been used by a drug rehabilitation group. The EHS Board of Directors enlisted help from the Holy Order of Mans, a non-sectarian order dedicated to teaching and service, to supervise and help set up the shelter. Members of the Order were trained in shelter work at Raphael House in San Francisco, a broad-based shelter for juveniles, victims of violence, and others. Brother Milton and Sister Deborah Koult were the first members of the Order to assist at Linden House beginning in March 1975. The Order continued to provide staff assistance to EHS until May 1977.

EHS accepted its first client in May 1975 and served 518 people, including 244 children, that year. In 1977, EHS received national recognition in an article in *Redbook* magazine, which named it as a resource for battered women. In its early years, EHS struggled with a reliable source of funding until finally in 1980, it began receiving annual funding from the United Way of Ada County.

Although Linden House's primary resources were devoted to battered women and children when it was established, increasingly a large number of its clients were homeless. Louise Hartman, manager of Linden House since 1993, estimates that in 1994, over 50% of Linden's clients were homeless women and children. In 1994, the last full year of operation, the shelter served 8,500 meals and provided 3,000 beds and "lots of showers."

In March of this year, United Way gave the shelter's Board of Directors a list of nine conditions to meet in order to receive

continued funding. The conditions required Linden House to provide the services of a full-time counselor and to devise a fundraising plan so that the shelter could become self-sufficient.

According to Marj Boren, president of the Board of Directors, board members were startled when they learned of the conditions. Their budget would not cover the cost of hiring a full-time counselor, and United Way did not offer to increase its level of funding. Also, the volunteer board felt they did not have the time or expertise to conduct a professional fundraising plan. According to Mrs. Boren, Linden's increased service to the homeless caused it to duplicate the services of Community House, a homeless shelter which opened in Boise in 1994. Some board members believe this duplication was United Way's reason for asking Linden House to raise more of its own funds.

After numerous discussions and several meetings, the Board of Directors voted in May to close Linden House on the basis that the conditions required by United Way were outside the shelter's mandate. At the board's last meeting, Laressa Struwe commented that members felt a certain amount of grief. The shelter stopped accepting clients on June 24, and on June 30, it closed its doors after two decades of service.

Immanuel's church council voted at its July meeting to use Linden House as an intern's residence for one year until a more permanent use can be decided. Scott Meikle, Immanuel's president, said he thinks that another service organization will eventually be able to use the home.

Linden's former manager, Mrs. Hartman, is hopeful that other shelters in Boise can serve the clients that previously went to Linden House. She thinks, however, that they will miss the atmosphere at Linden House. "Ours was considered a homey place...more like a family environment," she said. Linden House will be missed not only by those who sought shelter there, but also by those who took comfort in knowing that its services existed for those in need.

—Susan Bruns Rowe