

Sarah's House: Charity begins at home

by Tina Miles
902nd MI Group

As the old saying goes, 'charity begins at home' and the employees of the U.S. Army Investigative Records Repository, a subordinate unit of the 902nd Military Intelligence Group, Fort Meade, Md., are firm believers of that concept.

For several years, repository staff members have headed a contribution program for the occupants at Sarah's House, a supportive housing program located on Fort Meade property directly across from the main post, that provides case management, childcare and employment services for homeless men, women and children in Anne Arundel County.

"There is no way we could provide the amenities we have without the generous outpouring of volunteers, such as the Investigative Records Repository members. We are truly blessed," said Bruce Clopein, volunteer resource manager, Sarah's House.

According to the Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Baltimore's Web site, the program works to develop constructive behaviors and attitudes enabling clients to live as a functioning, economically independent family unit.

Sarah's House has been in operation here since 1987. It began as a shelter for women and children only, but now includes adult males. The main theme for Sarah's House



photo by Tina Miles

Volunteers from the 902nd MI Group prepares boxes for Sarah's House.

is keeping families together.

There are 82 apartment units and about 30 shelter rooms which house 130 guests, of which over half are children. During the winter, the number increases temporarily under the "freezing weather provision."

Three organizations are responsible for the operation of Sarah's House: the military, Catholic Charities, and the Anne Arundel County Department of Social Services. The buildings occupied were once World War II barracks that have been renovated.

The military provides a secure location, renovations, and operational costs, as well as volunteers, such as the Investigative Records Repository personnel.

"We're just a group of

people who feel blessed and like to share those blessings," said Mary Ware, security assistant, Investigate Records Repository. "We take great pride in sharing with others who are less fortunate."

Occupants are here for a number of reasons; most of the residents are victims of abuse, addiction or financial hardship. The children all attend public schools, and the buses pick them up first and drop them off last for anonymity purposes.

The occupants do not stay just overnight, they can stay up to two-years. Sarah's House is made up of two components: shelter care and independent living. The shelters are for short-term housing, up to 90 days, and are dormitory style. The shelter is the first area new

(continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3)

arrivals stay in. Occupants stay there free of charge and have supportive, structured schedules, such as specific dining areas and times. The independent living quarters are apartments, some having up to three bedrooms. These are for long-term, family residency. The participants must be recommended by a Social Services case worker and must have a job, since the fees are based on income.

"We have quite a celebration when an occupant moves out of the shelter and into the independent living apartments," said Clopein.

Sarah's House provides a licensed day-care facility on the premises, which is free to the shelter residences and at a small fee for those in the independent living program. They also have an all-volunteer after school program.

Sarah's House staff stays in contact with families for a year after they leave to check on their progress. Often the families are adopted by a church group at holiday time upon leaving, just to help ease the burden.

"When tenants arrive here they are usually in 'survival mode' just trying to make it through one day at a time," said Kathy Anderson, an outreach case worker at Sarah's House.

"Some have gone on to college, others now hold good jobs. I really applaud them," said Anderson. "Granted, not everyone leaving here is a success story. It really depends on the individual situa-



photo by Tina Miles

Sarah's House is a supportive housing program on Fort Meade, Md.

tion and why they were at Sarah's House to begin with. I mean, it's very hard to be in the outside world and pay for daycare on a McDonald's salary."

Clopein has a quote from Winston Churchill on his telephone voice-mail that sums up the overall efforts of Sarah's House, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

Approximately 70 personnel participate in the charitable support to Sarah's House and have been doing so for the past three years; prior to that they would make donations to local military families in need.

"I feel I receive just as much in return for what we share with Sarah's House, just in knowing we are able to help someone else; it makes me realize how much I really have in comparison," said Ware.

Sue Butterfield, director of the Investigative Records Repository, oversees each event and encourages her staff and personnel from the Central Clearance Facility and the office of the Freedom of Information Act to support Sarah's House.

"The generosity from everyone involved is overwhelming," Butterfield said. "When you look at 69 Easter baskets or boxes of Valentine's Day gifts, it's obvious the personnel truly give with their hearts,"

As the majority of charitable interest turns in the direction of sending care-packages to Soldiers abroad and support-our-troops campaigns sprout up across the nation, the Investigative Records Repository team maintains its commitment to Sarah's House and the people who call it home.