

Treasure Coast to get safe-house for children

By Donald Rodrigue
For Hometown News

TREASURE COAST — By sometime this summer, children removed from unsafe situations in the middle of the night or any other time of day will have a welcoming, cheery place to await placement in foster care when the planned Sanctuary4Kids opens in St. Lucie West.

Sanctuary4Kids is the result of cooperation between Devereux Community Based Care, a nonprofit organization overseeing child-welfare services in Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee and St. Lucie counties, and Guardians for New Futures, a Port St. Lucie-based nonprofit organization dedicated to meeting the unfunded needs of abused, neglected or abandoned children.

Christina Kaiser, community relations director for DCBC, said such a sanctuary is vital due to the fragile emotional state of young children.

“We need this center in our community,” she said. “Children are removed from their homes at all hours, and it’s a very confusing, disconcerting moment for them. They don’t need to spend that moment in the back seat of a car or in someone’s office.”

Guardians For New Futures President Debbie Butler — whose organization is spearheading the drive to open Sanctuary4kids as soon as possible — explained that the center will be staffed around the clock but each child would spend less than a day at the new facility.

“Sanctuary4kids will operate 24/7 with trauma specialists on site,” she said. “Children

will also be able to get a healthy meal, shower/bath, and clean clothes. “It will be equipped as a child/teen friendly house where they have the opportunity to play, watch a movie or play Xbox.”

A capital campaign to fund the six-bed assessment center is currently underway, and GFNF has already found a suitable location in St. Lucie West, she added. Ms. Butler plans to meet with a builder promptly to discuss construction of the new facility.

“We have raised over \$200,000 to build,” she said. “This is truly the community coming together to help the children; however, we still need funding and support for interior furnishings, etc. for Sanctuary4kids. So in addition to cash, we are looking to community businesses to help by pulling from their inventory to help us furnish the home.”

Once constructed, an outside organization will be contracted to run the home, which will serve children from the four counties. Ms. Kaiser said DCBC is now awaiting the results of a search to see what kind of companies are available to manage the facility.

“We’ve recently released a RFI to get an idea of who is out there who can run the program once it’s up and how much it will cost to run, and ultimately, who will pay for it,” she said.

In the interim both organizations are actively involved in a public relations campaign to drum up support for Sanctuary4kids, including the creation of Gus the Sanctuary Dragon, a stuffed mascot that will represent the center. Gus has become the focus of a social media cam-



Gus joking around with GFNF Board of Directors and friends – Doris Plym, Melissa Jordan, Shaniek Maynard, and Esperanza Morales.

Photo courtesy of Donald Rodrigue

paign (#wheresgus) in which the child-friendly dragon will visit new people and places every Wednesday. Pictures of those visits will subsequently be posted on the Devereux Community Based Care Facebook page, where visitors can try and guess the locations of the photographs. Fans will also have the opportunity to meet Gus in person during a series of community breakfasts, during which DCBC staff will present a State of the Circuit address on local child-welfare practices and unveil its 2016 Devereux Community Based Care for Sanctuary community engagement campaign.

“We’re going to focus all of our community outreach activities on getting Sanctuary up and running,” Ms. Kaiser said. “We feel strongly that it’s something the entire community should get behind.”

Ms. Butler said recent figures back up the need for such a facility on the Treasure

Coast. “The last stats I got were that an average of 46 children are coming into care each month due to abuse and neglect, with the majority of them under the age of five,” she said. “So, as you can see, this is an urgent need for the children.”

Ms. Kaiser said the sometimes-odd schedule of child relocation makes the prompt opening of Sanctuary4kids urgent.

“This place would provide a safe place — a landing — where they can catch their breath, go back to sleep if it’s 2 a.m. or get a hot meal or snack if they haven’t eaten,” she said. “The placement process can be lengthy, so having a comfortable place for a child to wait it out is important to their overall well-being and mental/emotional state.”

For more information visit the DCBC website at www.devereux.org.

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PALM CITY, FLORIDA

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Cost per Person: \$175.00
Early Bird Special: \$165.00 per person if you sign up by March 23rd, 2016

Light breakfast snacks prior to challenge.
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Participation limited to 100.
Please register early.

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