

Groundbreaking celebrated for Oak Harbor Cottages

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NEWS-LEDGER

McPHERSON—The official groundbreaking for the Oak Harbor Cottages was held on May 21, but the work leading up to that moment began long before the shovels turned the dirt.

The McPherson Housing Coalition (MHC) is working with local organizations and volunteers to build 10 small homes in the Oak Harbor Cottages complex built on property owned by MHC at the corner of Oak and Skancke Streets. The homes will have two bedrooms and be available for families with children for six to 12 months while they work to find a more permanent housing solution.

MHC Director Chris Goodson first realized the need for temporary housing after attending a meeting on homelessness in McPherson eight years ago.

"I went to this meeting

thinking, 'Why are they inviting me, and what homelessness are they talking about?'" Goodson said. "I quickly realized [homelessness] was real and it was a problem."

Homelessness encompasses more than just the people you see living on the street. It can be families living in hotels, sleeping on friends' or relatives' couches or living in cars. According to Goodson, there are 1,299 people living below the poverty line in McPherson, including 500 families with children under the age of 18. The reasons for becoming homeless can vary from falling behind on rent due to illness or a job loss or losing a home due to a divorce.

MHC currently is working with 16 families in McPherson to help stabilize their living situation.

While working on the homelessness issue, Goodson and other MHC staff recognized a gap in services for those trying

to find stabilization and reliable housing. Their solution is the Oak Harbor Cottages, which will provide not only 10 homes but legal help, mental health services, and counseling from a full-time, on-site couple.

MHC plans to give families the tools they need to get past crisis thinking and provide a feeling of safety so participants can better plan their future.

Goodson, who has worked with representatives of Senator Roger Marshall's office, hopes this can become "a game changer across the state" as other communities see the success of the program.

"McPherson is an amazing community. Every time there is a concern, everybody in this community rallies together to help," Goodson said during the ceremony calling out local volunteers, churches, and her team of Karolyn Moore, MHC program director; Don Bland,



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McPherson Housing Coalition Director Chris Goodson (right) and Case Worker Karolyn Moore (left) address the crowd at the groundbreaking for Oak Harbor Cottages May 21.

project volunteer; Mary Driscoll, MHC CFO; and Jaymie O'Dell, project co-coordinator.

The groundbreaking

marks the beginning of construction on three of the planned 10 cottages. More information about the project, including a

complete list of donors, can be found at mcpersonhousingcoalition.org/ or on the MHC Facebook page.