‘Better Futures’ home gives East Bay women hope

By Peter Hegarty, EAST SIDE TIMES
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Victims of domestic violence or living on the streets now have somewhere to stay as they look to get reunited with their kids and pull their lives back together.

The Time for Change Foundation, a San Francisco-based nonprofit, officially opened the doors of a house on Townsend Avenue last week that will eventually be home to six women and their children.

The first resident, Jagoda Zyger, who was homeless with her 4-year-old daughter for much of last year, moved in Nov. 29 after a stint in jail for petty theft.

The 24-year-old said she traveled from shelter to shelter around the East Bay, sometimes staying in a car, as she looked for a place to live that would give her enough stability to find a job and care for her daughter.

It’s a true life changing, Zyger admitted, after she proved the foundation’s leaders and local political officials to ceremoniously cut a ribbon to open the haven.

Just two days after learning about the foundation changing a visit last month to the offices of Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency, a social services agency in Oakland, Zyger was living in the house.

“I was very, very sad,” said Zyger, who grew up in Oakland. “I am really lucky. It’s a little unbelievable.”

While Zyger is currently unemployed, she will be required to contribute 30 percent of her income to the fully furnished house off Third World Avenue.

“We are empowering women to turn their lives around to make a change,” said Vanessa Perez, the foundation’s director.

About 200 women have applied to live at the house, said Kim Carter, who launched the foundation in 2002 after she tended substance abuse for years as she lived on the streets.

She also spent time behind bars. In 2007, she was convicted of possession.

Carter said she decided to change the direction of her life after she became a mother, and wanted to help those who shared her background.

“None of the women who will live at the house in Hayward can really afford to pay rent anywhere,” Carter said. “It will equal about $150 or $205 a month, for each women. But not just to help them transition into self-sufficiency.”

The women will be able to stay in the house for as long as necessary, Carter said.

“I am not going to remove the门票,” she said, adding that having building credits can prevent people from developing the skills — or even saving the money for an apartment depot or a vehicle — to live on their own and support themselves.

The foundation is funded through state and federal monies and through individual donations. Carter said its budget for Fiscal Year 2011 was $16 million.

But she noted the foundation’s purchases of the Hayward house, which an online real estate listing estimated the home was sold in October for $780,000, was funded entirely through donations.

The foundation also recently opened an office in Pleasanton, which will administer the house and help the women navigate classes for their skills and with other tasks.

Carter said the nonprofit, which also runs a seven-unit affordable housing complex in San Leandro — devoted to exposed into the East Bay Area because of the growing homeless population amid the pricey housing market.

It picked the Hayward location because of the ease of public transportation and schools, and because the house is in a relatively neighborly.

“This one is definitive on the right side,” Mayor Hugh O’Farrell said about the Townsend Avenue house, “and it’s doing the right thing.”