

The Home that love built

By Julie Bates Special to The Courier-Tribune

April 13, 2014 - 12:02am

ASHEBORO — Near Cross Road Baptist Church is a special home.

Built by Baptist Children's Home, it houses adults with special needs, but that is not what makes it unique. Its creation came out of the dedicated love of two parents determined to provide for their child and keep her close to home.

Asheboro Home provides care and structure to six adult women of varying ages with intellectual disabilities. It allows them to work, go to school and achieve a degree of independence that would be difficult otherwise.

Michael and Starr Ayers of Asheboro are parents to Ashley, a young woman with Down syndrome, a chromosomal condition that is associated with intellectual disability, a characteristic facial appearance and weak muscle tone.

As the couple aged, they wanted to make sure their daughter had the best life possible. Michael Ayers was instrumental in getting Asheboro Home built. He had been on several boards of directors that handled for-profit group homes and didn't feel that the residents always got the best care and attention. Ayers wanted his daughter in a faith-based home.

"My wife and I were planning for the future. I'm in my 60s and so is my wife. We wanted Ashley to be placed and happy. We had seen too many other parents of children with special needs wait too long."

To that end, he became chair of the fund-raising committee.

"To me there was a need. We did some research in the community and we identified at that particular time roughly over 100 people that would fit the paradigm of needing services of a group home in Randolph County. It's probably more than that now. We knew that brick and mortar was one thing, but we had to have somebody who could operate it."

Ayers discovered that Baptist Children's Homes administered group homes and began a series of meetings with them. Then came the challenge of finding the location, which ended when Cross Road Baptist Church on Old Cox Road agreed to rent them enough land for two group homes (one for women, one for men) for a dollar a year for 50 years. Intense fund-raising followed. The home opened its doors in 2008.

Ashley lived with her parents until she moved into the group home. She still has her room in their home.

Currently, Asheboro Home has six women. It has a waiting list for those hoping for an opening. The men's home remains a dream.

Ayers considers the home has been one of the best things he has been involved in.

"It's a gift that keeps on giving. Hopefully, after I am long dead and gone and Ashley is gone, it will still be there, people being served by that group home. If you have the other type of group home you are not sure of the perpetual make-up of it. This way with the Baptist churches and the Baptist Children's Homes it will go on in perpetuity and I really love that. People will benefit long after we are gone."

Homelike atmosphere

Asheboro Home looks like a comfortable brick house. A van pulls up and the women get off, laughing and

chatting as they enter into the residence. This is no institutional residence, this is home.

Danetta Christmas has been the administrator for nearly three and half years. She describes her position as God-sent. She takes pleasure in the achievements she sees the women accomplish and in the fact that they are comfortable with her.

“They feel they can talk to me about anything. They feel like they have someone who will support them. That makes me feel good about working here. It’s not about being the administrator. It’s about being with people that accept you for who you are. They put things into perspective for me. I have my right mind. I can take care of myself. I don’t need anyone to take care of me or tell me what to do. We have these young ladies that live here. They have a schedule, a routine, someone to tell them what to do and they still have a good day. They don’t let anything keep them from having a good day.”

Residents lead busy lives. Rising from 6:30-7 a.m., they fix their own breakfast, then go to work or to classes at Randolph Community College. Some volunteer. They go to the Randolph-Asheboro YMCA for exercise three times a week and attend Cross Road Baptist Church on a regular basis.

They love to shop and attend community events. At home they all have household chores and do devotionals. The group home provides a sheltered environment where they can have a degree of independence while staff makes sure they receive their medications, establishes the routine and provides the support these mentally and intellectually disabled women need.

“Because we have been trained, we can provide them with skills to help them learn to be independent, to live on their own if it becomes an opportunity for them,” Christmas said.

“It helps when there are aging parents. We have a young lady here whose primary caregiver was her father. Unfortunately, he passed away. She had to be placed where she would be taken good care of. So she was accepted here in our program. There are various situations. We have also had referrals from the Department of Social Services where there have been adults with intellectual, developmental disabilities who are at risk for abuse and exploitation. We have had individuals within the system that needed somewhere to stay.”

Need for a men’s home

Both Mike Ayers and Christmas realize there is a place and need for a Christian group home for men. Ayers has seen some of the horror stories of what can happen in group homes. He remains passionate in his desire for the other group home to be built.

“What I would really like to see is a men’s home right beside Asheboro Home. I hope I live to be a part of that because we have several people that have sons that helped us build the ladies’ home that need a group home to put their sons. They don’t have one like that. To my knowledge I don’t know of any other faith-based group home in the Asheboro area. That’s the pivotal issue with me, the faith based part of it.”

Christmas knows about the need as well.

“I get people asking me all the time, ‘When are you going to build a men’s home?’ And I say, ‘I’m sorry, but right now we’re trying to maintain what we have.’ The downturn in the economy has made it tough to get the other home built, not only because of the building costs, but the administrative costs as well. So many parents of intellectually disabled sons wait and hope that the original dream of a home for men as well as women will come into being.”

Danetta Christmas sees very clearly why places like Asheboro Home are needed.

“The plaque says Asheboro Home and people know it’s a group home. My ladies treat each other like sisters.

Our first and most important thing is that we believe in God and that we treat each other like family. We are a family.”