



Annette Wells, Staff Writer

Couple helps end drug nightmares

Thirteen days in jail was enough time for Marlo Williams to realize she didn't want to go to prison.

The one-month-old child growing inside her also played a part.

"I had lost my other four children. They were separated from me because of my drug use and I didn't want to lose another one," she said Wednesday at a sober-living home in north San Bernardino that she shares with five other women with similar backgrounds.

"I didn't want my child to be born a drug baby, so I came here," said Williams while sitting at the kitchen table holding her daughter, Khalia, now 6 months old. "It's been a blessing."

Owned by Kim and Mark Carter, the home on North Mountain View is structured and offers women especially those with children and who have been homeless, on drugs or in jail an opportunity to transition back into the community.

On Saturday, the Carters will open a second sober-living home in north San Bernardino where the two convicted felons can help at least six more women get back on their feet.

This home, located in the 3300 block of North Wall Avenue, is furnished, has three bedrooms, a children's playroom, two full bathrooms, a large kitchen and family room, and a back yard with a covered patio.

"Somebody helped me, now I'm going to do what I can to help others," said Kim Carter, 42. "I mean, look at Marlo (Williams). When I met her, Khalia hadn't even been born yet. All Marlo wanted was an opportunity to have her baby be drug-free. That's a pretty big step for her and she did it."

Though the Carters have had little opposition to their homes, some neighbors have shown disapproval, saying these kinds of homes are against the law.

However, the Carters are well within their rights, said Ken Schonlau, a director with the Sober Living Network of Southern California.

The Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988 prohibits cities and counties from making housing opportunities unavailable to people with disabilities.

"What has happened is the federal government housing laws included alcoholics and recovering addicts as people with disabilities," Schonlau said. "It also established the right for unrelated disabled people to live together as a family."

Soberhousing.net lists 23 sober-living homes in San Bernardino County, including the Carters' home. Rent ranges from no cost to \$400 a month. The Carters charge \$400.

Kim Carter said she and her husband have made investments through their personal assets to buy the homes.

Audrey Murphy, who lives near the Carters' first home, said concerned residents should give them a chance.

"You wonder if it's going to detract from your neighborhood, but, when I first met Kim, she was out planting flowers,' she said about sober-living homes coming into the area.

"When I saw that, I knew this was going to be OK. I could see that she was going to take care of the home. The people living in her home haven't been a problem. In fact, they're an asset to our community.'

Murphy and her husband, Jim, have lived in the area for 45 years.

Like the five women living at the original home, women chosen to live at Sweet Dreams, in addition to staying away from drugs and alcohol, will have daily chores.

Each is responsible for cooking at least once a week.

And, they will also have to sign a sheet when they leave the home identifying where they are going and when they will be returning.

"It's very structured,' said Williams, who is working on getting her GED. "I can't run around doing what I want. The purpose of this home is for transition. That means you find a job or get educated to better yourself.'

Kim Bell, who has been sober for 92 days, agreed.

Without the Carters' support, Bell might not have a job and visitation rights with her 5-month-old daughter.

"It's the longest I've been sober. This is an awesome opportunity for me to turn my life around,' she said sitting across from Williams.

"Even my ex-husband, (who) was a little reluctant to let my daughter come here to visit me, is beginning to understand that this is a safe environment. ... Now she comes and spends the day with me.'

Kim Carter said it's stories like those of Bell and Williams, as well as her own, that give her the drive to do more for the underserved.

"I'm an example that my past is not my future,' she said.