

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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LOCAL

Former foster girls will have a home in Lake Forest

The renovated house is part of a larger program to help youths without parents.

By **ERIKA I. RITCHIE**
THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

LAKE FOREST – For years since Chelsea Roberts was taken from her home because of abuse, she has wanted a place to call her own.

Now – four years later after being placed in Orangewood Children’s Home, a temporary foster home and at a group home in Mission Viejo – Roberts, 18, will be one of five young women living in a newly renovated six-bedroom home in a Lake Forest neighborhood.

The house is the Teen Project’s first home for emancipated foster youths in Orange County. The project is a collaborative effort between The Teen Project, a program that provides housing and college education to homeless foster youths, and HomeAid Orange County, a non-profit that builds and maintains housing for people rebuilding their lives.

According to foster care statistics, there are now more than 500,000 children in the foster care system nationwide, with 25,000 teens aging out of the system each year. Seventy percent of the emancipated foster youths hope to go to college, but only about 3 percent make it there. In California, more than 20,000 youths are homeless. Many of them turn to drugs, alcohol and prostitution.

The Teen Project’s mission is to pick up where the laws fall short by providing housing, drop centers and scholarships. The Lake Forest home is the first purchased by the charity. No special permitting was required by the city.

The 1,700-square-foot, three-bedroom, three-bath house will be renovated to six bedrooms and expanded. Located near Mountain View Park, it will provide a tranquil, homelike setting. A housemother will oversee the home and enforce living guide-



PHOTOS: MARK RIGHTMIRE, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Volunteers for The Teen Project join together to raise a wall at a Lake Forest home that is undergoing remodeling with the help of HomeAid. It will be the home for girls in the project.



Ashley Moody, who is in The Teen Project, writes “Reach for the stars...” on a wall in a home that will be the home for girls in the project.

lines such as sobriety, excellence in schoolwork and room cleanliness.

“It will provide a family atmosphere,” said Lauri Burns, 46, who with her best friend Linda Morgan founded the Teen Project three years ago. With donated funds and their own money, they purchased the house for \$415,000 a year ago and will put

THE TEEN PROJECT HOUSE

WHAT: The Lake Forest house is a collaboration of the Teen Project and HomeAid Orange County. It is expected to open by Christmas.

Number of residents: Housemother and 5 young women, ages 18-19

Total square feet: 2,500

Bedrooms: 6

Cost: The Teen Project pays \$1,200 per month for each resident, over two years, for food, clothing, school supplies and gas.

Interior Design: Donated by Anne Gunther
Donations: Being sought for furnishings, accessories and housewares. The Teen Project is registered at Target for these donations.

To report abuse: Child Abuse Register, 714-940-1000

To help: Call the Teen Project at 888-483-36346 or visit theteenproject.com

More online:

To see more photos, go to ocregister.com/lakeforest