

COMMUNITY

Furnishing homes for special needs adults

BY ROBERT CHRISTIE
 Staff Writer

TENAFLY – Residents have begun moving into the new affordable housing apartments at 311 Tenafly Road.

Ten residents with special needs have begun their relocation into the housing project, which was completed by Bergen County United Way and Madeline Housing Project, to live independently.

“It’s a dream come true,” said Marjorie Howes, whose son, Donovan, is on the Autism spectrum and will move into the apartments later this month. “It’s a huge blessing.”

Melanie Weisberg, mother of David, another new resident, also called the opportunity “a blessing.”

She said she and her husband had been considering for years ways for David to be as independent as possible.

David is visually impaired, a result of the Cohen’s syndrome.

Cynthia Massarsky, the chairwoman of Making-It-Home – a group that works with companies and nonprofits to bring furnishings to people in need – said these homes will provide an uncommon opportunity for adults with special needs.

“There are a lot of people with special needs who are able to live on their own and independently, but there is no low-income housing – meaning one floor, wide doors, the properly outfitted bathroom and things like that,” Massarsky said.

Making-it-Home later partnered with Bergen County United Way and the Madeline Housing Project – together known as BCUW/Madeline Housing Partners – to furnish the six apart-

ments.

The three organizations decided to try a crowd funding approach to finance furniture for the apartments.

Interested donors could go online, view the various pieces of furniture the partners were trying to acquire and donate money to whichever piece of furniture they choose.

Once the furniture was acquired, members of the community came out Nov. 20 to help furnish the apartments.

Each of the six apartments – four doubles and two singles – are outfitted with bathrooms including wheelchair-accessible showers, a kitchen, bedrooms, a living room as well as a washer and dryer.

Masarsky also said the apartments provide relief to parents who worry about their growing son or daughter with special needs.

“What happens is that parents [of people with developmental disabilities] get older and they begin to ask, ‘What are we going to do, who’s going to take care my kid who’s now an adult and where are they going to live?’” said Massarsky.

The finished apartments mark the end of the four-year project.

Madeline Housing Partners and the BCUW began looking into placing the housing at 311 Tenafly Road in 2011.

Although the partners were ready to move forward on the project, they could not proceed with building right away because construction would have been in danger of stream encroachment.

BCUW had to wait a year before they received a permit from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and was able to move forward on the project.

In 2013, BCUW worked to garner support from the governing body and received site plan approval in 2014.

Construction began in March 2015 and was completed this fall.

The United Way has already built a similar housing project in Allendale.

“When parents have children like me, they worry about their kids’ future,” said 30-year-old Diana who has Down’s Syndrome and lives in the Allendale apartments. “Well, I’m making my future now with my big dream to be an independent adult. For five years I have been living in my own beautiful apartment with nine other differently-abled adults.”

She added, “Having a disability isn’t easy but we are making it, especially with the help of the community we live in that has opened doors for us each and every day.”

Tom Toronto, president of BCUW, said completing the apartments Tenafly was “fulfilling.”

He added it was great to see the residents’ “pride and excitement as they take possession of their apartments.”

Mayor Peter Rustin also praised the completed efforts for an affordable housing complex in Tenafly.

“It makes our town that much more inclusive and that’s a good way to be,” said Rustin. “One of my hopes is that we can do another one of these facilities in a short period of time.”

Residents were allowed to begin moving on Dec. 1. However, residents such as David and Donovan plan to move in at some point before the end of the year.

Email: christie@northjersey.com





KEVIN J. RILEY/PHOTO

Volunteers move furniture into an affordable housing unit on Tenafly Road for individuals living with special needs. Ten residents moved into the building, which was completed by the Bergen County United Way and the Madeline Housing Project, to live independently.