

VICTORY MISSION TO PROVIDE DAYTIME SHELTER FOR FAMILIES

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Victory Mission plans to open a one-stop daytime shelter for homeless families Oct. 1, Director Susan J. Fowler announced yesterday. Fowler said it will be the city's first daytime walk-in center where meals and social services will be available to homeless families.

Many of the city's emergency shelters provide beds for the night only and require all clients, including families with children, to leave in the morning, Fowler said.

SOMETIMES, THE shelters are full, and the families must sleep in cars or walk around all night. Those families often receive no services, she said, adding that the new center will provide such aid.

Up to 50 families will be served daily at the mission's walk-in center at 600 E. Starr Ave., Fowler said. There will be no age limit on the children.

"Our main concern is getting the kids and the pregnant women off the streets," she said.

Homeless families with children often wander Downtown or sit in fast-food restaurants or the Greyhound Bus terminal until they are thrown out for loitering, she said.

"The children are losing weight on the streets every day," she said.

The walk-in center will be in a gymnasium and kitchen of the former Milo School. Those areas of the building are in disrepair and will be remodeled by volunteers before the center opens.

Victory Mission's overnight emergency shelter is located in another wing of the

building and houses a limited number of families and single men each night. It opens at 8 p.m., and all residents must leave by 9 a.m. the next morning.

"IT BREAKS my heart when I have to turn them out (from the overnight shelter) in the morning," Fowler said.

Social service agencies are expected to set up satellite offices there to help families find housing, employment or public assistance and thus avoid the "merry-go-round" of traveling around the city in search of help, Fowler said.

Families who come to the center will be able to shower and wash their clothes, Fowler said. The mission also has a food pantry and secondhand shop that distribute donated groceries, clothing, furniture and household goods to 2,000 families each month.

Fowler said 12 volunteers are needed to staff the center from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. She hopes area churches will provide the volunteers. The \$3,000 monthly budget will be paid with donations from private sources, corporations and churches, she said.

Fowler, 37, of Hilliard, runs Victory Mission with her husband, the Rev. Don Fowler. The Rev. Fowler, 41, is an ordained member of the Full Gospel Fellowship of Churches and Ministers International, an interdenominational evangelical group.

He is director of Victory Ministries, the parent organization of Victory Mission and nine other humanitarian projects worldwide.

A FEMALE RESIDENT, who requested anonymity, said that before she went to Victory Mission, she stood in doorways with her daughter because "you've got to hide from the cops or they'll pick you up."

The woman said she became homeless after she left her abusive husband. Her life has turned around since she arrived at the mission a month ago. The Fowlers have arranged for permanent housing and counseling for the woman and her child.

"They love you, and they care," the woman said, fighting back tears. "You're safe here."