

Christ Church, Triune Mercy Center partnership paves new road for women

Angelia Davis, davisal@greenvilleonline.com Published 2:12 p.m. ET Oct. 26, 2017 | Updated 6:32 p.m. ET Oct. 26, 2017



(Photo: Lauren Petracca, LAUREN PETRACCA/STAFF)
CONNECTTWEETLINKEDINCOMMENTEMAILMORE

A new partnership between Christ Church and Triune Mercy Center will strive to heal and provide a path of freedom for women trapped in a cycle of sexual exploitation and addiction.

Their efforts will come through Jasmine Road, a new 501(c)3 organization that will offer a holistic residential restoration program for adult female survivors of sex trafficking, prostitution, and addiction.

The program includes an offer of two years of rent-free housing, trauma-informed therapy, counseling services, education and job training to female survivors.

Jasmine Road, which launched Thursday, is modeled after the successful Thistle Farms, a community of survivors in Nashville, Tennessee.

According to Kathryn Norwood, chair of Jasmine Road's Board of Directors, the move to launch Jasmine Road began after Becca Stevens, founder of Thistle Farms, came to Greenville in 2015 and spoke at Christ Church about the successes they have achieved.

Afterward, Norwood said, "we knew this was something we needed to explore for Greenville."

"With Greenville sandwiched between two of the top cities for human trafficking in the country, Atlanta, and Charlotte, we knew we needed to help provide a way out for local women caught up in sex trafficking, addiction, and prostitution," she said.

Triune Mercy Center's Deb Richardson-Moore said: "It takes a lot to end up on the streets in prostitution...a lot has to go wrong. A lot of the women we see have lost every relationship in their lives. When we heard about Thistle Farms we realized this might be the answer and offer the model needed to successfully and gently help these women redirect their path while providing what they need for a new start."

Stevens is an ordained Episcopal priest who started out as a chaplain who "really wanted to offer a sanctuary for women who had criminal histories of trafficking, prostitution, and drug addiction."

She wanted to do that outside of the walls of any religious organization treatment facility or penal system. Twenty years ago, she opened a house and invited five women to live there for five years at no cost. The women were asked to commit to two years of the housing, therapy and dental work.

In other words, Steven said, "just commit to healing for two years. Whatever that looks like to you."

"Those five women came in and they really helped change legislation and the conversation in the country," Stevens said.

In 2008, Stevens said she started getting a lot of calls from other communities around the country wanting help to model a program like Thistle Farms.



Becca Stevens, founder and president of Thistle Farms, speaks at a luncheon for Jasmine Road at Furman University on Thursday, October 26, 2017. (Photo: Lauren Petracca, LAUREN PETRACCA\STAFF)

Greenville's Jasmine Road, which launched via an inaugural luncheon at Furman University's Younts Center, is one of Thistle Farms' 30 sister agencies around the country.

Stevens was the featured speaker at the launch, sharing individual stories of success and the positive impact Thistle Farms' unique program design has had on the program's participants and the community as a whole.

Stevens, who was recently named a 2016 CNN Hero and was honored by the White House as a "Champion of Change," said the program's model is simple.

A key component of the model is to provide two years free with no authority in the house. Because most of the women have a history of childhood trauma, authority is a huge trigger and it doesn't work, Stevens said.

The model also includes therapy, medical and dental health services, financial literacy and vocational training, and employment through social enterprise.

Thistle Farms has an 84 percent graduation rate for those who complete the initial orientation phase and 62 percent of the graduates stay in long-term stable housing, working and sober, according to information provided.

Bon Secours St. Francis Health System is Jasmine Road's healthcare community partner.

Organizers of the new nonprofit seek to raise \$40,000 to aid in the renovation of Jasmine Road's first safe house, which is scheduled to open in first half of 2018.

Once participants begin healing in the residential program, they will begin working in an innovative Social Enterprise designed to assist in the development of employment and social skills that will prepare them to eventually gain employment at a living wage, organizers said.

Visit jasmineroad.org