

Brownfields

Success Story

A Community with Its Heart in the Right Place

Ceredo, West Virginia

Ceredo, West Virginia, is a small town along the Ohio River with a population of roughly 1,500. Though some residents here have struggled with addiction and economic insecurity in recent years, the community comes together to look after its most vulnerable members.

That sense of social responsibility inspired Judy Gilkerson to create Golden Girl Group Home. Founded in 1983, the group provides support to teen and young adult girls in the foster care system and helps them learn independent living skills. “Children, especially girls, who have lived in foster care and ‘age out’ at 18 have a high risk of poverty, abuse and incarceration,” says Gilkerson. “We want to make sure that they’re prepared for the real world, and that starts by providing them with a place to live.”

The Opportunity

In early 2016, Nikki Lyn Thomas, Golden Girl Group Home’s advancement director, began scouting for a location to build a new transitional home for young women aging out of foster care. She found a site that seemed to check off all the important boxes: large enough to accommodate the apartment buildings, an owner willing to donate the land and a central location. But environmental testing revealed potential toxins that were prohibitively expensive to remediate. “That was a difficult setback,” says Thomas, “but we weren’t going to give up.”

Disappointed but undeterred, Thomas reached out to a community reinvestment expert to discuss alternatives. “She told me about the EPA Brownfields Program and how it helps communities assess and clean up potentially contaminated properties. Given our experience with the previous site, I knew that we needed EPA in our corner.”

A few weeks later, an architect and former colleague alerted Thomas to a new site that met the group’s criteria. The property owner, a local businessman, sold it to the group for just a dollar, allowing Golden Girl Group Home to use more of its budget on construction. “His generosity was wonderful,” Thomas says of the businessman, “but what made the donation so special is his connection to the area. His family is very active in the community and has a genuine interest in seeing us succeed.”



EPA Grant Recipient:

Wayne County Economic
Development Authority

Grant Type:

Brownfields Assessment

Former Use:

Small Commercial Building

Current Use:

Transitional Housing



Thanks to a generous donation from a local business owner, Golden Girl Group Home was able to build new apartments at a central location in town.





Architects overseeing the project had to adjust their design plans after discovering the property sits on a slight decline.

“Stories like this make me so happy to work for this program. Golden Heart Apartments should be the national model for Brownfields projects.”

*Stephanie Branche,
Project Manager,
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For more information:

Visit the EPA Brownfields website at www.epa.gov/brownfields or contact Stephanie Branche at 215-814-5556 or Branche.Stephanie@epa.gov.

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The Assessment

With a site secured, the Wayne County Economic Development Authority used its EPA Brownfield Assessment Grant to fund a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment in the summer of 2016. The assessment, which was conducted in compliance with the All Appropriate Inquiries Final Rule, revealed no major contamination. Receiving environmental signoff on the property encouraged a variety of other donors to contribute funds for the site. The West Virginia Housing Development program provided a loan, and local businesses and private donations helped furnish and refine the apartments. “It was a real group effort,” says Gilkerson. “People in this area look after each other.”

The apartments took about a year to build, and Thomas says the construction process went smoothly for the most part. One minor snag occurred when water began to pool on the property, which is U-shaped and sits on a slight decline. Heavy rains in the area forced construction to stop until workers could vacuum the water out and allow the ground to dry. Architectural designs were adjusted to better address stormwater, and other stormwater management measures were taken during construction. “After all we’d been through, this was just a little bump in the road,” Thomas says.

The Results

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held in July 2017. Golden Heart Apartments now houses 24 girls, who are required to attend college or a vocational program while living there. The complex features an Educational Resource Center where residents can meet with tutors and socialize with one another.

Thomas believes that the new apartments are a win-win for the entire community. “We’ve beautified the block and surrounding area,” she says. “The church across the street has a new mission, the local library has a wider audience and local shops benefit from a wider customer base.”

For Gilkerson, the apartments represent the culmination of over 35 years of advocacy. “Teenagers are like stallions, full of energy and passion,” she says. “I love these kids and I love helping them. It’s comforting to know we finally have a full suite of resources to offer.”



Golden Heart Apartments provides safe housing and educational resources to young women aging out of the foster care system.