

## GraceWay Village hopes to raise \$3.5 million for facility for homeless families in St. Lucie County



For more than 1,200 children enrolled in St. Lucie County's public schools, going "home" at the end of the day means returning to a dingy hotel room, temporary campground, or maybe just the family car. And, after parents lost work hours or jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, those numbers are climbing.

With only one, part-time, homeless shelter in the county, the options for homeless families are few. GraceWay Village in Fort Pierce hopes to change all that, said its executive director, Cathie Mouring.<sup>1</sup>

*U.S. Rep. Brian Mast looks over development plans with Cathie Mouring.*

Photo from GraceWay Village

GraceWay is in the midst of a \$3.5 million capital campaign to construct a Family Restorative Living Facility on eight acres it owns on Hartman Road to house up to 12 families for 30-90 days, or longer when necessary, while they rebuild their lives and prepare to find more permanent homes, Mouring said. The hope is to have the facility open in two years, she said.<sup>2</sup>

While there, residents will be offered life and parenting skills training, may complete their GEDs, learn a job skill, or how to cook for the family. Each family will be assigned a social worker and must perform cleaning and other chores, Mouring said.

Families will have their own bedrooms and bathrooms, but will share the kitchen and other common areas.

During the pandemic the need “has grown immensely,” Mouring said. Rent and mortgage assistance from the CARES Act and other sources helps some, but the eligibility requirements often leave some families out in the cold. “These are people who were working hard, but were living paycheck to paycheck,” she said. Some 40% of those laid off during the pandemic were earning \$40,000 or less per year – within 6-8 months, many families found themselves homeless, she said.

“These are not what lay people might assume are homeless because of drugs, alcohol or mental illness,” Mouring said.

Major donors are the key to building the facility, after which, grant opportunities will open up to fund operations, Mouring said. For donor information, email [info@gracewayvillage.com](mailto:info@gracewayvillage.com) or call 772-925-3074.