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Soon, church will have own trailer in park It'll let Chesterfield church expand outreach in troubled community

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They came together in a circle inside Shady Hill Trailer Park. Bibles, they bent their heads in prayer. A flag with the words "New Life in Christ" fluttered in the wind.

"If you can persevere through the tough times," Dawn Roark said, ministering to the group, "you can get through anything."

Roark, a member of the Cornerstone Assembly of God church in Chesterfield County, looked out at the faces of the women assembled in metal folding chairs around her.

"I can see hope in all of you," she said.

Members of Cornerstone, a sprawling middle-class congregation nestled among large-lawned homes in central Chesterfield, have been reaching out for months to the residents of Shady Hill Trailer Park. It's one of the county's toughest mobile-home communities, where drugs, prostitution and crime are part of daily life for some.

Members of the church have formed bonds with the residents and their children. They have provided a hot meal or a toy and kind words when needed. But recently, this bond between two unlikely groups has grown deeper.

By Christmas, Cornerstone hopes to have a trailer of its own in Shady Hill.

"We dug the footers last week, and soon they are going to be pouring the cement," said Shawn Franco, community pastor at Cornerstone.

Recently, an article in The Times-Dispatch detailed the church's outreach to the Shady Hill community on Jefferson Davis Highway, where at least one trailer is divided into four cabanas no bigger than 8 feet by 10 feet. The article and photographs focused on some people who call Shady Hill home, including Trisha Reamy, who lives in a trailer with 10 people, and Helen Crowder, who lives in one of the cramped cabanas.

After the story ran, donations poured in to the church to help the trailer park residents, Franco said. Members of the congregation also opened their wallets. In less than a month, more than \$10,000 was raised.

Franco said they plan to use the trailer for after-school programs for children and outreach for adults, including programs for Shady Hill's many Spanish-speaking residents. Cornerstone members are using some of the donated money to stuff storage bins with items for the children at Christmas.

"It'll be like a little stocking stuffer," Franco said.

The church has adopted 23 children in the community and plans to buy presents for them. Members are baking Christmas cookies and other sweets to give to the dozens of kids there. The church is also talking about creating a warehouse for donations that folks contribute to Shady Hill residents.

In the meantime, Cornerstone has joined with other congregations, including members of Sherbourne United Methodist Church, to unite in their efforts to improve life at Shady Hill.

"We are just trying to build a bridge so that people can do what's in their hearts," Franco said. "The power of what we are seeing is that people are taking the time to care for others. And what most people are finding is that it's really not that hard."

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