



## White Fields welcomes first residents

**James Coburn**  
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EDMOND— White Fields may be the first place some boys call home. They learn they have a purpose in life by achieving their personal best.

The group home is designed for severely abused and neglected boys who are custody of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Child Welfare Division. Just north of County Line Road and 220th Street, the home welcomed its first two residents on Thursday.

More than 50,000 Oklahoma children are reported to be victimized by neglect, abuse or life-threatening situations each year, according to Oklahoma Department of Human Services, 2005.

White Fields offers boys levels of long-term care so they may heal from the trauma they've experienced and become productive residents, said Mary Jones, executive director. A stable environment keeps them from being moved from home to home, as often happens with the foster care system. The boys can move through the system at White Fields without ever leaving their home.

"They have probably been in patient settings and they are not able to maintain in foster home," Jones said. "So they require a group home for more supervision and help with their behavior problems."

Founded by Deer Creek residents Tom Ward and his son, Trent Ward, the facility is designed to eventually care for 70 boys who can live at White Fields until adulthood. Services include behavior management, counseling, education, psychiatry, recreational therapy, social skills training, independent living training, life skills, vocational planning, mentoring programs and volunteers programs.

"We set ourselves in the precedence of it's not what's wrong with the child — it's what's happened to him," Jones continued. "Our goal is to help them with the trauma and help them to adapt to living independently."

The home, on 140 acres of land, is set up so boys move through levels of care models beginning with 24 hour a day management. They then progress to a group parent home on the campus.

White Fields helps the boys learn how to feel safe with a consistent schedule helping them to know what to expect and not feel anxious. Trust issues are addressed during therapy. The program's aspect of a permanent home until adulthood is a new model in addressing recovery from child abuse, Trent Ward said.

"What we're trying to duplicate as much as we can in a group home setting is their parents — coming on a surrogate parent to them," Ward said.

"We're creating that sense of belonging, that sense of knowing that no matter what's happened to them in the past, it's not going to happen to them again. And they have people they can trust here. And they can live their whole life knowing that, 'I grew up in a place where people loved me.'"

The 1999 Deer Creek High School graduate considers his role with the boys to resemble a mentoring grandparent. The youth, ages 8 to 12, will be eligible to attend Deer Creek schools when or if they are considered ready.

White Fields is contracted with the Child Welfare Division of DHS and not Oklahoma Juvenile Services, which means the boys have not been adjudicated as delinquents with criminal behavior, Jones said. Socialization will help the boys function “in the real world” after leaving White Fields.

Athletic activities are promoted by a new playground and basketball court. A baseball field will be added. Boys will learn how to fish at the on-campus pond and also grow vegetables.

Six buildings include two house-parent cottages, a multipurpose building with a dining hall, meeting space and indoor recreational space. The administration building also includes the school. Other cottages will hold eight or 10 boys, each with independent bedrooms and bathrooms.

A second phase of the project will include a fine arts building to offer therapeutic music and art. A music recording studio will have two practice facilities. An art studio and gallery will enable the boys to exhibit their art.

Also, an education building will be constructed with administrative offices, four classrooms and a library. A gymnasium will have a full basketball court, weight room and an indoor swimming pool, Ward said. An outdoor water park area will be constructed along with two more house parent and residential houses.

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