

Palm Beach Gardens North Palm Beach

Lake Park, Juno Beach and Riviera Beach

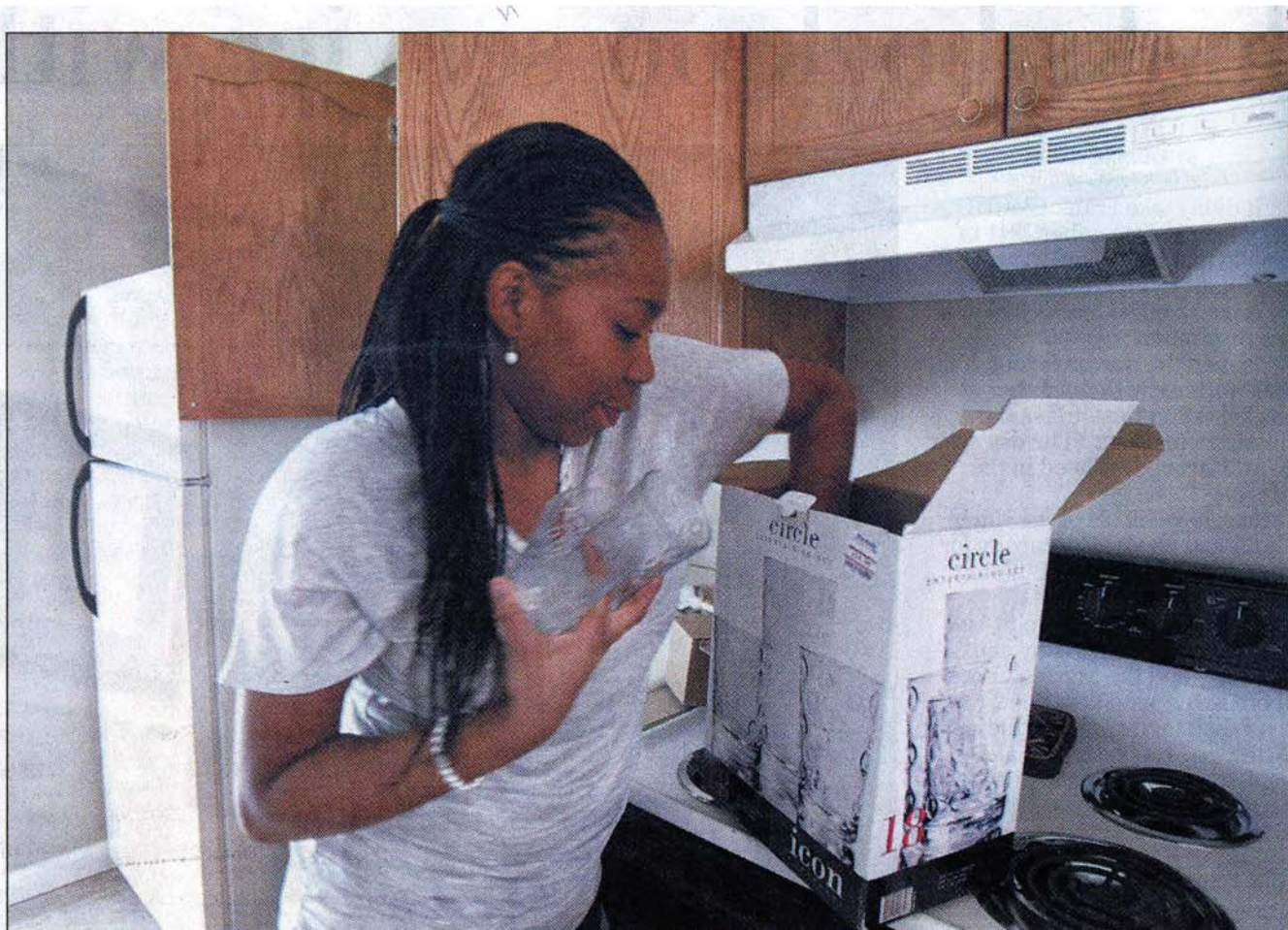


ABOUT THE PHOTO

Patris Wilfork, 18, looks out the window from the bedroom of her new home at Villages of Hope, a nonprofit organization that helps kids who have aged out of foster care. Residents are required to work and go to school. **Story, page 8**

CYDNEY SCOTT/Staff Photographer

Nonprofit gives former foster kids hope for stable life



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Stephanie Bordenave, 20, unpacks glasses at her new home at Villages of Hope. Villages of Hope offers foster kids who have

aged out of the system a place to live, helping them make the transition to independence.

Villages of Hope gives young adults support, place to live.

By BILL DIPAOLO
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

PALM BEACH GARDENS — Patris Wilfork could have been on the streets when she turned 18 last month.

Instead, the former foster child is living in an apartment, holding a job and going to school. Just like an adult.

That's the whole idea behind Villages of Hope.



Peak

"Yes, I'm under pressure here because I have to grow up. But it's a good pressure," said

Wilfork, who is attending school to obtain her GED and works about 35 hours a week as a cashier at Publix. "I'm lucky. Many people have no place to live when they age out of the system like me."

Villages of Hope, which opened early this year, is a part of Place of Hope, which was started in 1998 by Christ Fellowship Church. Both are now separate 501 c 3 agencies.

Place of Hope, on 9 donated acres off Northlake Boulevard, provides homes for children between the ages of 5 and 18. Courts determine whether the children can return to their biological parents. Villages of Hope, east of I-95 off Northlake Boulevard, provides homes for foster children who turn 18 and are no longer eligible for state-funded care.

Unable to find a job or a place to live, many foster children who "age out" of

the system end up homeless or in jail, said Charles Bender, director of the program.

"It's a failure in the foster care system. We are providing a home and training when these former foster children need it very badly," said Bender.

Villages of Hope last year bought three beaten-up duplexes off Northlake Boulevard, just east of Home Depot, for \$1.05 million. With the aid of local businesses, which helped with everything from new air conditioning to furniture, the duplexes now are tidy homes for up to a dozen former foster children who have turned 18.

The young adults at Villages of Hope are required to hold jobs and go to school in exchange for paying low rents, usually about \$300 a month. Parties and overnight guests are not allowed. There is a curfew, and Theresa Peak, the resident parent who lives on campus, can enter the apartments anytime.

"If it wasn't for this place, I would probably have to move back to Canada with my mom," said Stephanie Bordenave, 21, who lives in one of the duplexes. Bordenave works about 35 hours weekly at Bed, Bath and Beyond and attends Palm Beach Community College.

The young adults have had childhoods filled with crises. Wilfork, who entered her first foster home at age 6, has lived in 22 foster homes. Bordenave had a baby when she was 16 and a student at Palm Beach Gardens High School. Bordenave's child goes to day care while Bordenave works and goes to school.

Peak strives to build a family atmosphere among the residents. She holds regular meetings, where the residents talk about their jobs, school and daily

lives. They are planning a Thanksgiving meal together. The residents help each other with transportation.

"Sometimes I'm their mother. Other times I'm their sister. And sometimes, I have to be the strict parent," said Peak, 38, who worked for about 12 years with the Palm Beach County Juvenile Detention Center.

The young adults are expected to stay in the program about two years. By then, they should have the job and social skills to make it on their own, said Bender.

"We're not sticklers. If they need a little more time, they can stay longer. But they know we mean business. If they foul up,

Villages of Hope

Villages of Hope wants to raise \$4 million for these projects:

24-hour shelter: For pregnant girls under 18 who are in foster care and children in foster care. A resident would be on duty 24 hours a day.

Community learning center: For teaching life skills, such as how to get a job, write a resume and save money.

Transitional housing: Program managers plan to build two one-bedroom apartments for young women with children who have aged out of the program. Rents would be low, and mothers would be required to hold jobs and take life skills classes.

*For more information about Villages of Hope, call (561) 775-7195.

they are in trouble. They know what it's like out there," said Bender.

About one in four young adults does not make it through the program.

"Being an adult means freedom. It also means responsibility. Some just can't handle that," said Peak.

Such setbacks are frustrating, Bender and Peak agreed. But the reward comes from watching former foster children such as Wilfork and Bordenave succeed, they said.

Both young women want to go into medicine, possibly pediatrics. If not, being

a dental hygienist would be exciting, said Bordenave. Wilfork is interested in obstetrics and gynecology.

"Anything is possible," Wilfork said.

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