

## Good cheer flourishes at DePaul group home

### Teens embrace seasonal spirit

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

WILLIAMSON — For Andy Sampson, the Christmas song "Home for the Holidays" literally takes on a double meaning.

Sampson, 17, has been a resident of the Williamson-based DePaul Mental Health Services group home almost from the time the facility was built two years ago. In addition to celebrating Christmas with his own family, Sampson has also been looking forward to holiday festivities with the DePaul staff and fellow residents.

"Christmas, to me, means togetherness — being with people you like, people you love," Sampson said.

Although his DePaul acquaintances are not his actual relatives, "it's kind of like they're sisters and brothers; aunts and uncles," Sampson explained.

As Sampson spoke, a flurry of activity surrounded him. One of the DePaul group home's biggest celebrations to date — an open house Christmas party last Wednesday evening, Dec. 15 — was kicking into full gear.

Residents' relatives, along with other DePaul staff members, were treated to a dinner in the brightly decorated house. In one room stood a tree that residents and staff decorated the previous week.

"The kids, for the past few weeks, have been so excited and happy," remarked Trudy Jansen, who serves as the group home's residence manager. "They began caroling when they were decorating the Christmas tree."

Six teenagers currently live at the Williamson home, which has a maximum capacity of eight people.

At the time the group home was built, it served as a pilot operation for the Adolescent Program of DePaul Mental Health Services, 1099 Jay St., Rochester.

Governed by the New York State Office of Mental Health, this facility provides an alternative living arrangement for boys and girls ages 12-18 from western New York.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Andy Sampson (left), a resident of the DePaul Mental Health Services group home in Williamson, takes time out during a Dec. 15 holiday party to play with his 3-year-old brother, Justin.



Group home resident Stacy Button greets Masyn, the son of overnight counselor Andi Clark (right), at the Dec. 15 social.

Jansen explained that "intense psychiatric therapeutic issues," such as backgrounds marked by abuse or suicidal tendencies, serve as the primary reasons why most residents and their families seek out assistance from this program.

She said that residents are referred to

DePaul through residential treatment facilities, psychiatric units or community-based mental health centers.

The time residents stay at the home can range from six months to years. After they turn 18, residents are required to move on — either to college, to live with their families or to go out on their own, or enroll in another type of treatment program.

Supervision is enforced at the Williamson home. "We find that these kids require a great deal of structure," said Jansen. "It has to be a very therapeutic atmosphere, and the kids know that."

Stacy Button, 15, has lived at the group home for three months. She said that "the staff is sometimes strict, but they're pretty cool. If you have a problem, they'll always sit down and talk to you."

Yet at the same time, residents are allowed a fair amount of independence. They all attend school, and can receive

permission to go off grounds during their leisure time as well. Many spend weekends with their families.

"Rarely have I seen residents come through here that are chronically mentally ill," said Jansen.

Sampson said that he was recommended to the group home by his therapist. "I was having trouble at school, and I was having trouble socializing with people," he acknowledged.

Living away from his family initially proved to be a frightening move for Sampson. "I was almost willing to leave once, but I made a deal with my therapist that I would stay here for six months," he said.

Now Sampson is happy with the decision he made. "My living here has helped me out a lot."

He is currently looking forward to applying for college, but Sampson plans on maintaining his ties to his friends at the group home.

"I've gotten close to a lot of them, so I'll keep contact with them as long as I can," he said.

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