

Publishers Clearing House scam hangs on

An occasional homeowner is lucky enough to get a knock on the door and a surprise visit from Publishers Clearing House with a big check in hand. But scammers try to cash in on the game by

A foundation to a better life

New house aims to help homeless teens and young adults in Colorado Springs

BY JAKOB RODGERS
jakob.rodgers@gazette.com

Gone is the cramped homeless-shelter space that Jonathan McConathy once occupied.

Now the 19-year-old wakes up every day in his own bedroom — a spartan abode adorned only with an

elk hide on one wall and an American flag on another.

But this room is nothing less than the foundation for a more stable life.

In a house built in 1904 on a hill just outside downtown Colorado Springs, McConathy lives with other teenagers and young adults on their

own, indoors and out of a shelter, many for the first time. It's part of a new program spearheaded by the nonprofit Urban Peak, which aims to provide a new brand of transitional housing that could help these young people avoid a return to the streets.

"It's their life, and they now have to start to decide how they want it to look," said Shawna Kempainen, executive director of Urban Peak.

The program is the realization of a long-sought goal for Kempainen,

SEE HOUSE • PAGE 7

HOUSE

FROM PAGE 8

who always envisioned creating something a little different — a house where several teens and young adults could live, free from apartment walls.

The U.S. Department of Human Services gave the nonprofit a five-year, \$890,000 grant in late 2017. After an exhaustive search for a house, another Colorado Springs nonprofit, Partners in Housing, provided one of its recently vacated houses.

"It's truly transitional," Kempainen said. "This is really that bridge to transition to adulthood."

It's direly needed. From Oct. 1, 2017, through Sept. 30, 2018, the Urban Peak shelter housed 185 youths. During that period, the organization's outreach workers contacted 601 homeless youths on the city's streets.

As a result, the nonprofit is embarking on a broader housing plan that could allow it to oversee about 70 youths living in apartments or houses across the city in 2019, thanks to an influx of state funds and federal housing vouchers.

That includes the nonprofit's latest five-bedroom, two-bathroom house, which McConathy now calls home.

A year ago, he left his family's



JERILEE BENNETT, THE GAZETTE

Picking up his room and doing his laundry is one of the chores that is required of Jonathan McConathy, 19, in the Urban Peak transitional living for homeless youths, shown here Thursday. The new housing is a partnership with another nonprofit, Partners in Housing.

farm in Berthoud, seeking a job in construction in Colorado Springs. He found it more difficult than he imagined, and he ended up at Urban Peak's downtown shelter.

There, the staff helped him find work, including at a mechanic's shop, at Wendy's and at Jimmy

John's. But he said finding a place of his own was difficult in the city's hot housing market.

"They're so expensive, it's hard to afford," McConathy said.

Now he's at the new house and saving 30 percent of his income for a nest egg. Other rules here in-

clude bans on weapons, drugs or alcohol.

But the house has no curfews, so its residents can come and go as they wish. The federal grant pays for the nonprofit's lease, the residents' food and for caseworkers to help them find a more permanent

dwelling.

"It's a lot better here. There's a lot more freedom," McConathy said. "I can do what I have to and not worry about curfew."

The house feels like any other tidily kept home. A Christmas tree greets visitors just inside the front door, atop beautiful hardwood floors that extend throughout most of the house. A list of chores covers a nearby white board, and everyone living there is expected to pitch in.

An office for those caseworkers, who spend about 18 hours a day at the house, is just beyond the dining room table. And one room is about to be transformed into a computer room.

The house is open to people ages 16 through 21. They're chosen by the Continuum of Care, which uses a housing survey to match people needing housing with the best available resource.

It's a program in short supply. As of late November, 92 people ages 18 to 24 had completed that housing survey and needed a place to live, Kempainen said.

The goal is to begin giving them a sense of freedom from the shelter, while offering them a community of peers to ensure their move is successful.

"It's putting them in a position where they do have to start thinking independently about how to make their life work," she said. "Yet we are right there, side by side."