

Ballinger Homes gets a makeover

By Andrea Jensen

It isn't a matter of what the community can give you, but what you can give to the community. This is the belief of the King County Housing Authority when it comes to helping low income people keep a roof over their head.

With communities all over the county, one housing development in particular received a new face that has residents grinning ear to ear.

It's called Ballinger Homes. Located in Shoreline, this 36-year-old complex, built on swampland, was in need of some major updates. Tattered roofs and poor drainage were among the many rundown amenities at the site. Now the problem amenities are an issue of the past.

After a \$3.6 million remodel, low-income residents live in a facility that looks brand new. "People pass by and think this is a regular apartment complex and ask to apply," says Rhonda Rosenberg, KCHA Director of Communications.

When they ask to apply, they learn of a waiting list that contains 5,000 hopeful applicants.

The 110-unit family development is a place for people who have very little or no income. Residents who are disabled or

homeless and refugees top the list and are given priority.

Fifty-six-year-old Tanya Wendeln has been living at Ballinger Homes for 14 years. She first came to the community in dire circumstances. "I was a single parent pregnant with my son. I was at a place I couldn't afford. It wasn't a very good feeling. I felt like I had nowhere to go," she said.

Wendeln never graduated high school and had worked various jobs in insurance sales until her medical condition prevented her from working at all. She needed a place to raise her son and was on a waiting list for Ballinger Homes for a year before moving in.

Although she is still disabled and survives on disability alone, the community has helped her achieve many successes. "I just recently received my GED from Shoreline Community College," she said proudly. A great accomplishment for Wendeln, who participates in an education outreach partnership KCHA has with SCC. The objective is to help residents find work training and to continue their education.

"It's a good community. My son (who is 16) is involved in the homework factory," and attends Shorecrest High School, Wendeln said. She is one of many residents who have children and are happy to have a safe

place to raise them.

The remodel is a reflection of an even better lifestyle for the residents. In addition to great education programs (including ESL), a food bank, and clothing exchange, the updated community feels like new — from new sidewalks, windows, clothing lines and vinyl siding, to an overall reduction in energy costs.

"Housing really underlies everything — health, a more stable family, economic development, and quality of life," remarks KCHA Executive Director Stephen Norman.

Norman, who's been in the field of housing development for 30 years as well as the Housing Commissioner for the city of New York, says his job is very rewarding. "Some of these people have incredible stories to tell. They've been caught up in all this political turmoil," he said.

Of the 400 residents, 80 percent are immigrants, many of whom come from places like Africa. Some are refugees and are thankful just to be living.

Fozia Abdi, a Somali immigrant, came to Ballinger Homes with five children, ages raging from one to ten years old. "I can't work raising my children. My husband works as a truck driver and a fisherman in the summer. We needed a place for low income people and this place is a really nice community," she said.

The federally funded



Photo courtesy King County Housing Authority

Built in 1968, the housing development was in need of updates.

development employs 350 staff members and houses 200 children. They hope to continue to provide low-income services and updated facilities for those who need it.

For more information on Ballinger Homes please contact King County Housing Authority Northend Area Office at (206) 574-1240 or visit www.kcha.org.



Photo courtesy King County Housing Authority

Ballinger Homes recently underwent a multi-million dollar remodeling project.