

# Region to gain Scholar House

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(Photo: Provided )

A hub of support for single parents struggling to provide good care for their children while working and going to college is about to sprout in Newport.

Construction of the Northern Kentucky Scholar House, consisting for 48 two- and three-bedroom apartments, a quality daycare center, and space and staffing for life-skills classes, is expected to begin in June.

It's hoped the project will be finished and ready for tenants a year later, in June of 2015 – leading to a more promising future for those who pass through its doors.

There already are Scholar Houses in Lexington, Louisville, Paducah, Bowling Green, Owensboro and Pikeville. The Kentucky Housing Corp. program is designed to help low-income families as parents earn post-secondary degrees.

“It breaks down the barriers and supports them all the way through,” said Tom Guidugli, executive director of Neighborhood Foundations, the housing authority in Newport.

<http://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2014/03/08/scholar-house-newport-college-single-parents-housing/6222679/>

“It’s transformational,” said Tammy Weidinger, president and chief executive of the Brighton Center.

### **Single mom in college juggles parenting, work, college**

“It sounds like an excellent program,” said Ishia Palmisano, a 27-year-old single mom with three young children. “There are a lot of people who maybe think they can’t go to college.

Palmisano knows the struggles of being a single mom who both works and goes to college. She’s a student in an associate-degree program for business management at Gateway Community and Technical College, and she’s always running.

“I’m in three classes now, and I’m going to end up dropping one class,” Palmisano said. “It wasn’t working out with taking three classes and trying to help my kids at home.”

Her oldest child, Joseph, is 5 and in kindergarten at Newport Primary School. Her daughter, Mary, is 4 and goes to a Head Start program, and she has a toddler, Victor, who’s 2.

Palmisano said she’s lucky to have encouraging and helpful parents, Maria and Greg Palmisano, who help her with the kids and cheer her on her career path.

She also has help from the Brighton Center, which provides home visitation for young children and their parents, to give them a boost in early childhood education.

“They said, ‘You can do it. You have a great support system,’” Palmisano said. She earned a 4.0 GPA last semester, her first at Gateway.

Guidugli asked the Brighton Center to partner with Neighborhood Foundations because the agency already has the knowledge, the clients and the expertise that people of low-income backgrounds with young children need to stay on track and move ahead. The agencies have joined with the Model Group of Cincinnati, a development and construction company for urban neighborhoods, to create the Northern Kentucky Scholar House.

Funding is in place for the estimated \$8.3 million project that will be at 450 W. Sixth St., between Sixth and Seventh streets and Brighton and Patterson streets. The area now sports a parking lot and is next to the Neighborhood Foundations Community Center.

The Scholar House will have a playground outside and gymnasium inside so that kids get plenty of healthful activity, according to architectural plans. It will also have a conference-like room where experts in life skills and education will meet with residents to teach them how to become self-sufficient, Weidinger said.

The Kentucky Housing Corp. says the goal is for Scholar House participants to leave the program able to live free of public assistance, including housing.

“It’s a two-generational approach,” Weidinger said. “It’s not just for the parents; it’s for the children as well. This will help keep our children on track developmentally.”

Campbell County Fiscal Court “enthusiastically” provided a \$500,000 Community Development Block Grant toward the Scholar House, Judge-executive Steve Pendery said. “One of the really unfair things in life is when a kid just doesn’t have a chance because their parents can’t provide for them,” he said. “This program offers the chance to break the cycle of dependency that some people are trapped in.”

The Scholar House will be available for applicants who have a low income, children and are at least 18 years old.

Weidinger said those who enter the Scholar House must be enrolled in a degree program at a state college before they’re in, and they need to show promise of succeeding in college. “Scholar House is not for everybody.”

Those accepted will have case management available to them as well as support in their own community, by living in the same complex as others in their situation.

### **Area colleges see chance to change family’s future**

The coordinators of the project already have memorandums of understanding with Gateway Community and Technical College, Northern Kentucky University and Cincinnati State Technical and Community College. The colleges will be aware of their students’ status as Scholar House residents and will keep track and provide support to them to help ensure their success.

Gateway President G. Edward Hughes said the institution is committed to a partnership with Scholar House. Many Scholar House clients likely will go to Gateway, Hughes said, and they will find classes to help them become oriented to college enrollment as well as advising they need.

The role of Gateway promises to go beyond that, however, Hughes said. He anticipates having Gateway students in various disciplines offer life lessons, such as financial literacy, help with the day-care center and more at the Scholar House itself.

“It’s a great partnership that benefits both of our organizations,” Hughes said. He anticipates that most Scholar House students will be first-generation college students that Gateway will help with orienting to college.

He said he’s particularly interested in how the Scholar House program provides incentive and help for parents and a path for children to benefit from their parents’ success. “When you can help not only the mom, but the kids, you have then changed the future of every person in the family that comes after that.”

“It takes away the struggle,” Guidugli said.

The initial recruits for the Scholar House likely will be folks receiving help from the Brighton Center or housing authority.

In addition, Northern Kentucky schools with day cares for young, single parents will be tapped for the program. "We'd like to see this as a bridge for them," Weidinger said.

"The majority of our people are young mothers with children," Guidugli said, and the agencies' history with clients will help recruiters figure out who would be best served, and most likely to succeed, in the Scholar House environment.

Palmisano lives in a Newport Housing Authority apartment in Newport and said many young, single mothers live there and could benefit from the Scholar House. "I think that would be an awesome, awesome opportunity for them, especially in Newport," she said.

Guidugli said that, if construction moves as planned, recruiting for the N.Ky. Scholar House will begin in the summer of 2015 so that enrollees are ready for college classes in the fall of that year. □

Scholar House criteria• Single parent with primary custody of child/children has first priority• Low income; eligible for Section 8 rent subsidy• Enrolled as full-time college student at a state college• At least 18 years old• Children under 5 must be enrolled in Scholar House Child Development Center• Must move from Scholar House no later than six months after obtaining two- or four-year degree  
Source: Northern Kentucky Scholar House overview