



ROXANA DICKERSON

Lydia House volunteers, including Roxana Dickerson, Barbara Purcell, Tanya Hubbard, Jessica Ford and Olga Santana.

Freedom for Females

By Matt Bendell

Former female inmates are provided the opportunity to transform their lives at Lydia House.

What began as a mere dream three years ago for a group of ladies from the women's jail ministry at First Baptist Church Orlando became an exciting reality when Lydia House, situated in **Central Orlando**, opened its doors to women released from the 33rd Street jail.

Christina LeBarron, director of Lydia House, says the Lydia House is a much-needed tool that brings transformation and lasting change to these formerly incarcerated women.

Lydia House offers a 12-18 month program where women learn how to live on the outside. "We meet all of their physical needs with food, clothing and shelter," says LeBarron. "Additionally, during their stay at Lydia House, women will grow spiritually, receive professional individual and group counseling, discover their spiritual gifts, acquire job training, develop healthy relationships and learn life-management skills."

Without a proper support system of encouragement from people who care, many of the women could resort back to old habits. "Ultimately, they end up back in the prison, because they have no support and the cycle begins all over again," LeBarron says. "The Lydia House was created to help end this cycle of freedom and incarceration."

Funded in part by a \$100,000 grant from Dr. Phillips Charities, the Lydia House first opened its doors to help women in May 2010. Other organizations were instrumental in getting the project off the ground. "We are a partnership ministry of First

Baptist Church of Orlando and The Hope Church," says LeBarron. "Pastor **David Uth** and Bishop **Allen Wiggins** have a vision to impact the Orlando community together. Lydia House is the beginning of that partnership."

Other partners include Grace Medical Home and Bread of Life, providing food and medical care. In addition, LeBarron says a partnership with the Orlando Union Rescue Mission has also provided women residents access to their adult education program. "As a result, ladies that need their high school diploma will be able to reach that goal."

More than 120 volunteers freely give of their time and resources to contribute to the maintenance of Lydia House. Services they provide include mentorship, Bible study, job search partners, nutrition counselors and transportation assistance. Many volunteers say that Lydia House is life-changing, not only for the residents, but for them as well.

Roxana Dickerson of First Baptist Church of Orlando says seeing the women's lives radically transformed each week is incredible. The small amount the community gives them comes back three-fold. LeBarron agrees. "Each person's life has value. Sometimes, it only takes a small investment, like time, love or support to help them find their value." **L**

To get involved with the Lydia House, visit CentralFloridaLifestyle.com.