

# Deseret News

## New \$8 million apartment complex opens for homeless seniors

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WEST VALLEY CITY — Scores of community advocates celebrated and a few former residents sighed as a new \$8 million apartment complex for homeless seniors officially opened Wednesday.

The 59-unit Kelly Benson Apartments were built by the Salt Lake County Housing Authority in conjunction with a variety of community partners, and residents have already begun moving in at 3120 S. 3600 West.

Pamela Atkinson, a long-time advocate for the homeless, lauded the project as a prime example of "permanent supported housing" designed to "get people back on their feet so they're not out on the streets."

She said it's become obvious through examining data from similar housing projects, as well as through personal stories, that the concept "is working" to address and work toward alleviation of chronic homelessness in the county.

Bishop Richard Edgley, first counselor in the LDS Church's Presiding Bishopric, said the facility's name is a reminder of the triumph that can come from tragedy. Kelly Benson was described as a "mental health consumer" who spent months in a coma following a major accident more than two decades ago, and has since devoted his time to advocacy for the homeless and mentally ill,

Like others who experience personal tragedy and transform their pain into community outreach, Benson has improved the lives of others "because he didn't let tragedy get him down," Bishop Edgley said.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was one of many community partners that donated thousands of dollars in goods and services to finish and furnish the apartments, whose residents must be 55 or older and have been chronically homeless. Their income must be 80 percent or less of the federal poverty guideline.

Rent is paid on a sliding scale, at 30 percent of a person's income, whatever that may be.

While advocates and new residents joined in celebrating, some of the 1,100 area residents who signed a petition more than two years ago trying to relocate the apartment complex were reflecting on how life will play out now in the neighborhood.

Scott Warr was one of those who opposed the location. His home was near the property, but after residents failed to dissuade city officials — who had approved a zoning change without their input — Warr and at least two others moved from the neighborhood.

"I was concerned enough about it I now live in Springville. It's not the only reason I moved, but it's one of them. I still own the home there and I do still have family up and down that street," Warr said Wednesday.

It's been more than two years since residents pleaded for a relocation, noting the corner the complex is built on is a major pathway for school children walking to three different schools in the area.

Warr said at this point, he has "mixed feelings. I don't believe I'm wrong, but I hope I am. I view it as a train wreck just waiting to happen with all the kids going through there.

"The federal definition of what a chronically homeless person is includes drug and/or alcohol addiction and mental illness. I think it's only a matter of time until something happens to one of those children."

Warr said his concerns are based on data gathered from police records for the neighborhoods around

two other county-owned housing projects for the homeless.

"To date, no one with the housing authority or any one else in government has been able to tell me how this facility will be any different from those two facilities.

"If the numbers hold true, I think we will be seeing at least three police calls there per week, well over 50 percent of those dealing with alcohol. There will be assaults and battery."

The Granite School District was drawn into the debate over the facility's location, Warr said, noting the district "is required to have a specified safe route for all walking children. A couple of years ago, they said when Kelly Benson opened that would no longer be deemed as a safe route," Warr said.

"When school opens again in September, what does the district do now?" He said the only alternative he sees is busing.

Those who celebrated the new project Wednesday are now looking to the future.

Michael Gallivan, who along with his father, Jack, has helped raise funds for the homeless and was one of the movers behind the new apartment complex, announced a "1 percent campaign" at the ribbon-cutting.

He asked Salt Lake County residents and businesses to commit to donate 1 percent of their annual income one time in an effort to build more housing for the homeless, and to replenish the endowment fund that helped build the new facilities.

"We need to build about 2,000 more units to end chronic homelessness in Utah forever," he said.

For information, see the website at [www.crusadeforthehomeless.org](http://www.crusadeforthehomeless.org).

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