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Renovations helping social service agencies  
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A midnight line forms at Mission Metroplex in Arlington as residents camp out overnight for the privilege of having a volunteer dentist stick a drill in their mouths the next morning.

In the evening, children at the Arlington Night Shelter ask people to pick them up and hold them long enough for a drink at water fountains. Later, the children's feet dangle as they sit shakily atop adult-sized toilets.

Renovations planned or already under way at both locations are expected to ease life for the city's poorest residents.

The small white duplexes behind Mission Metroplex in Arlington have been there for almost 50 years, but today they are hardly recognizable. Louis Heinze Construction Co. and an array of volunteers have transformed the four duplexes - a total of 6,000 square feet - into one 2-story building with 17,000 square feet.

Tillie Burgin, executive director of Mission Metroplex, beamed as she walked through the newly built upstairs portion.

"You'll have racks and bins here where we'll sort the clothes," she said. "We'll arrange this so we'll have a place to store things."

The upstairs area allows the mission to store clothes, furniture, medical supplies and other donated items. The additional storage increases the amount of space downstairs in the adult day shelter, the volunteer dental clinic and the clothing room, where residents select used school clothes for their children and work clothes for themselves.

"We'll have room for two more dentist chairs in the dental clinic," Burgin said.

First Baptist Church spearheaded a fund-raising drive and helped raise the \$353,000 needed to transform the facilities. Much of the supplies and labor were donated by volunteers.

Officials at the Arlington Night Shelter have their own improvements in mind. The shelter is using a \$50,890 community development block grant to make its building more user-friendly for children.

The addition of children's playrooms and pint-sized drinking fountains and toilets will make the shelter less intimidating for youngsters and will create a more controlled environment, said Becky Orander, executive director of the shelter.

"The building is geared toward adults now," Orander said. "We're going to have rooms that will be bright and colorful and have carpet for kids to crawl on."

Child-sized toilets will make it easier for parents to potty-train their children.

"That will help a lot as far as parenting skills," she said.

Part of the grant will also pay for weatherproofing and insulation.

The renovation will probably begin in February or March and take a month to complete, Orander said.

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