

## Rotarians Learn About Help For Former Foster Youth



**ROTARY SPEAKER...**The Reverend Seth Kaper-Dale of the Reformed Church of Highland Park speaks to the Rotary Club of Westfield at its May 18 meeting about Irayna Court, which houses young women who have aged out of foster care and helps them work toward independent living.

**WESTFIELD** – The Rotary Club of Westfield on May 18 hosted the Reverend Seth Kaper-Dale of the Reformed Church of Highland Park. Reverend Kaper-Dale presented on Irayna Court – apartments built above his church that house six young women, ages 18 to 22, who have aged out of foster care.

In the model of “it takes a village,” the church and surrounding community nurture and mentor the young women, as well as provide them with personal and career counseling.

This is accomplished using state and county funds. The young women each pay part of their own rent. The goal is to assist them in transitioning to living independently and to totally supporting themselves. The church has garnered a total of \$7 million for its programs, including Irayna Court, that help the most vulnerable.

In New Jersey overall, approximately 300 young people age out of foster care each year. This means that at age 18, typically after living in multiple foster homes, they are on their own. With no family, no means of self-support, little education and no social network, they must fend for themselves.

As a result, a high percentage of them end up back in the public system in one way or another, each of them costing taxpayers approximately \$40,000 per year. Irayna Court, in addition to making an investment in the futures of these young women, who, through no fault of their own, need help to become productive members of society, is thus saving taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars each year.

Westfield Rotarians welcomed guests from area organizations to hear Reverend Kaper-Dale, and important new connections were made. Dawson Yeomans of Furniture Assist, a non-profit volunteer organization that provides furniture and other household items to those trying to set up new living arrangements, upon first meeting Reverend Kaper-Dale, said, “We can probably get you whatever you need.”

Rotarian Linda Maggio, Chief Ex-

ecutive Officer of the Westfield United Fund, sat with Reverend Kaper-Dale at lunch and learned details about his work. Amy Wiwi, from Lowenstein Sandler PC (Roseland) also attended, as did Westfield Area Chamber of Commerce Board members Harriet Schulman and Jay Tintle, along with Karen Yutsus of CONTACT We Care and the Optimist Club.

“The generosity of Westfield residents, as well as residents of surrounding communities, is dazzling,” said a statement by the Rotary Club of Westfield. “Individuals are generous. A perusal of websites of the many non-profit organizations reveals impressive programs for those in need. People generously volunteer their time and energy. The many programs benefit Westfield proper, but also the surrounding areas. Helping others to better help themselves benefits us all.”

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