

As the Christchurch City Mission raises money to build a \$10.5 million building, CHARLIE GATES spends a week finding out how the mission helps some of the city's most disadvantaged people.

Helping addicts off their poison

Emma rests both hands on her swollen belly. "If it wasn't for this place, there's no way I would be keeping these two boys," she says.

The 35-year-old woman is coming off a mixture of heroin and ecstasy for the sake of her unborn twins, but cannot do it alone.

Emma, not her real name, has been in the Thorpe House social detox centre for about two weeks.

"Everyone else makes me feel like one of a million. This place makes me feel like one in a million," she says.

"There is nowhere else I feel accepted and I can feel like myself.

"I don't feel this is a battle I can fight on my own."

Thorpe House is a safe, calm place for people coming off drugs and alcohol.

They call it warm turkey.

Housed in a converted villa in the grounds of the Christchurch City Mission, the centre is deliberately serene and withdrawn from the world.

There is a sheltered front garden with a porch seat. Art from the home's residents lines the walls and natural light floods the high-ceiling rooms.

There are art classes, tai chi in the morning, and group



THORPE HOUSE

- Thorpe House had 205 residential clients last year, 87 females and 118 males.
- Ages range from 17 to 68.
- 85 per cent of clients have co-existing mental health disorders.
- The most common drugs people were coming off were alcohol and cannabis, followed by opiates, P, BZP and solvents.
- The average stay was two weeks.

counselling sessions every day.

Once a week there is the "Journey of Discovery", which is actually a bus trip.

"It is a good vibe in this house," says Thorpe House supervisor Simon Rouch.

"You get to stop here and have time out.

"It is a good place to reflect."

Rouch says the relaxed, safe space combined with regular meals, good sleep and strict routine have a major impact on



'Bloody miraculous': Thorpe House supervisor Simon Rouch, pictured with alcohol and drug services manager Jan Spence, says residents respond well to the serene atmosphere and strict routine at the detox centre.

Photo: STACY SQUIRES

residents of Thorpe House.

"It is bloody miraculous. Honestly, I mean it.

"When people come in they are desperate.

"They are at rock bottom . . . But when they stay here, they have stopped taking poisons into their system.

"They go to bed at the same time every night. They are showering every day and eating good food."

The house also has a respite bed, where people can take refuge when they fear a relapse.

One man stays at Thorpe

House every Anzac weekend to avoid the drinking hordes and the temptations of a relapse.

Gregory is 11 days into a 21-day detox from alcohol and cannabis. "If Thorpe House wasn't here – I was really bad a couple of years ago – if I hadn't had Thorpe's help, I would not be here now," he says.

"It is so amazing, because it gives you the chance to really gather your life together and face the world again."

He says he reached rock bottom when he could not get out of bed in the morning and

lost the will to live.

His struggles with alcohol and cannabis have held him back in life, he says.

"I haven't achieved anything I want to achieve. I could have achieved a lot.

"I have worked in bars and restaurants and relatively low-paid jobs.

"I have been fired from many jobs and I have been in the court system."

The hard work begins when people leave the safe confines of Thorpe House.

Gregory always goes straight

to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting as soon as he leaves.

"It is in your face all the time and it is so easy to take drugs and alcohol."

Emma is worried about leaving. "I have never felt safer in my life. It's going to be scary to leave."

■ Tomorrow: Services for women.

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