

Detroit Free Press

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NEEDED TO MENTOR CHILDREN: HAVEN, Oakland County's center for the prevention and treatment of domestic violence and sexual assault, is looking for men to mentor children staying in the program's shelter. Volunteers plan activities, games and events, along with spending time with the children. Weekly two-hour training sessions begin in September. No experience is needed. For training dates and an application, call Belle Hornung at 248-334-1284, ext. 659.

— TAMMY STABLES BATTAGLIA

Mobile home park sued over rule

Its 1-child policy in violation of law, Fair Housing Center says

By DAVID ASHENFELTER
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Cassandra Kraehnke says she didn't pay much attention in 2009 when a rental agent at a Monroe County mobile home park refused to let her move in because she was expecting a second child.

But when Kraehnke discovered that the federal Fair Housing Act prohibits landlords from discriminating against families with children, the 29-year-old woman decided to act.

She contacted the Fair Housing Center of Southeastern Michigan, which investigated the park and confirmed its policy of rejecting rental applications from couples with more than one child.

Kraehnke and her husband, Harley Kraehnke, a driver for a Monroe car auction, sued the park in U.S. District Court in Detroit, resulting in a confidential out-of-court settlement in April.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Justice Department filed its own lawsuit against Shamrock Village Mobile Home Park, along with a proposed settlement. Under the settlement, the park's owner, Tel-Clinton Trailer Courts, agreed to comply with the law, train its employees and create a \$20,000 pool to compensate other applicants who were turned away because of Shamrock's alleged policy. The company also agreed to pay a \$7,500 civil penalty.

Shamrock's rental manager, Mildred Wampler, a defendant in Tuesday's suit along with company president Eugene Ponzio, wouldn't comment when reached Tuesday. Ponzio didn't return calls.

Cassandra Kraehnke said she and her husband were desperate to find a new home in April 2009 after she became pregnant with her second child. At the time, the couple was struggling financially.



ANDRE J. JACKSON/Detroit Free Press

Cassandra Kraehnke holds son Karl, 2, as daughter Rebecca, 4, plays Tuesday outside their home near Monroe. Kraehnke and her husband sued a mobile home park after being turned down because she was expecting a second child.

They were losing the lease on their existing mobile home and were having transportation problems. The 54-unit park near Monroe was the perfect location because it's across from a Meijer, Kraehnke said.

After Shamrock rejected them, Kraehnke said she and her husband separately moved in with different relatives until they could find a new home.

"It was hard because I had two little kids and my husband wasn't there to help me," Kraehnke recalled.

Today, they're proud and happy residents of Shamrock.

Pamela Kisch, executive director of the Fair Housing Center in Ann Arbor, which serves six counties, said the center receives complaints about various types of housing discrimination — but Kraehnke's was the first involving a one-child limit.

The federal Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, color, religion, disability, national origin or familial status.

Kisch said landlords can ask prospective tenants about family size, but not about how many are adults and children.

"The idea of a pregnant woman with a 3-year-old child being turned away because she was having a second child is pretty appalling," Kisch said.

The Justice Department said any victims of Shamrock's policy can file claims by calling the U.S. Attorney's Office in Detroit at 313-226-9151.

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