

News

Project opens the door for family

RICHARD ROLKE

Morning Star Staff

Taking time to pull off her shoes would have slowed tiny Ella down as she explored her new house, and even mom couldn't halt the pace.

"She's got muddy boots," said Terri Barker as she watched two-year-old Ella and four-year-old Shealyn bound up the stairs of their 25th Avenue condo Wednesday.

Just minutes earlier, Barker, husband Kyle Verhulst, the girls and five-month-old Kyler had been given the keys to the 1,500-square-foot unit they are buying through Habitat for Humanity.

"We never thought we'd ever have enough money for a downpayment," said Barker.

Verhulst has two jobs while Barker has one, but even then, real estate prices had put home ownership almost out of reach. Habitat for Humanity, however, got involved and the family will pay a mortgage set at one-third of their income. It is also interest free, meaning they just have the principle to pay down.

Up until now, the family has been renting a 700-square-foot house for \$900 a month. With their mortgage less than that, the couple expect to begin putting some money aside.

"This is such an opportunity," said Barker.

The family's unit is one of six in the new Under One Roof complex. Two will be rented out by the Vernon Community Fund and Trust as affordable housing while the Kindale Developmental Association will oversee three units for people with developmental disabilities.

"These units will fill a real need in our community," said Annette Sharkey, with the fund and trust.

Plans for the complex developed as part of a campaign to address an affordable housing shortage, which Sharkey insists is a social and economic issue for Vernon.

"If we want to thrive as a community, we need affordable housing for everyone," he said.

The City of Vernon donated the land and funding for the \$1.9 million project came from a number of government agencies, public fundraising and community partners.

Much of the construction was done by Okanagan College trades students.

And Under One Roof is expected to



LISA VANDERVELDE/MORNING STAR

Kyle Verhulst and Terri Barker hold up the keys to their new home with their children Shealyn, four, Ella, two, and Kyler, five months, while Shealyn and Ella dance around their new bedroom.



But in the meantime, Barker and Verhulst are going out furniture shopping and their children are getting used to their new surroundings — whether it's sliding down the stairs or hiding in closets.

"I like my new room," shouts Ella as she and Shealyn spin around in their soon-to-be bedroom.

establish a template for future affordable housing initiatives.

"We look forward to many more partner-

ships," said Mayor Wayne Lippert.

"There are many more projects we're looking at doing."