

Volunteers brighten up offices where hope resides

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Lowe's volunteer Don Rhode Sr. and his son Don Jr., 10, add a fresh coat of paint Saturday to the social services offices at St. Mary's Interfaith Community Services in Stockton.

CLIFFORD OTO/The Record

By **The Record**

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STOCKTON - For many of the 700 people eating lunch daily at St. Mary's Interfaith Community Services in downtown Stockton, the help they get begins and ends with a hot meal.

But for those who need more - such as help finding a job or a permanent place to live - the path to self-sufficiency starts in the offices at the back of the campus.

Those offices have seen better days, but over the weekend a group from Lowe's worked to replace torn carpets, paint over dingy walls and give a makeover to the rooms that often are the launching pad to better days for some of Stockton's poorest residents.

People who are poor and homeless are worthy of respectful treatment, and being served in a nice environment helps them realize that, too, said St. Mary's CEO Edward Figueroa.

"It's a first step to restore that dignity," he said.

The donated time and resources is most welcome in an economic climate making it harder for donors to give while the need for services continues to grow.

Last weekend, a group of employees from Lowe's on Hammer Lane and its distribution center at the Port of Stockton and their families used a \$1,200 budget to fix up the offices. They also brought in new chairs from another donor to make the waiting room more comfortable.

It's a worthy cause to help St. Mary's provide a valuable service, said Susana Manzo, director of human resources at the distribution center.

"It's great what they're doing here," she said.