

Homeless interviewed for rapid re-housing program

By Ethan Forman

Staff writer

January 15, 2010 06:00 am

DANVERS — The Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership began interviewing homeless families at the Days Inn yesterday as part of a push, funded by federal stimulus dollars, to move them into permanent housing.

This is the first time the partnership, a nonprofit housing agency, has worked with Danvers families, many of whom have been living in motels here for months.

The partnership plans to return to the Motel 6 and Knights Inn on Route 1 in February, Wagner said.

"This is probably our second biggest intake we are doing," said Beth Wagner, a spokeswoman for the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership.

A four-day series about the motel families, which concluded yesterday in The Salem News, reported that 130 families were living in Danvers motels as the problem peaked in November. As of Jan. 6, 79 families were still there.

The families have become homeless for a variety of reasons during the economic downturn, and were placed in Danvers motels after the state ran out of emergency shelter space.

The Housing Partnership, the state's largest regional provider of rental housing voucher assistance, is interviewing the families to determine their "size, income, assets, and other personal and financial data," Wagner said. The interviews are part of a rapid re-housing program, which aims to empty the motels of homeless families within 24 months.

The information gathered yesterday will be used to identify those families who would be able to succeed if they were given a limited-time rental subsidy.

Those families whose members are working or who have a good work history have the best chance of being able to stay in an apartment once the subsidy runs out, Executive Director Chris Norris said.

On Wednesday morning, Danvers state Rep. Ted Speliotis said he met with Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership on their plans to visit Danvers.

"They have drastically reduced the number of families living in hotels and motels in other communities, and I am hopeful they will be equally successful in Danvers," Speliotis wrote in an e-mail to Selectman Gardner Trask.

The program would provide families with a \$1,000-a-month subsidy for one year while requiring families to pay 30 percent of their gross income toward their rent, Speliotis said. The program is similar to Section 8 and other housing programs, but it does not restrict families to living in any one community, Speliotis said.

The program costs less than the \$2,800 it can cost to house a family at a motel for a month.

The housing partnership piloted its rapid re-housing program in August at the Cambridge Gateway Inn before federal stimulus money became available. The agency met with 61 of the 76 homeless families living there and identified 25 of them as candidates for the program. Of those, 22 have been housed.

In September, the state awarded the Housing Partnership and a partner agency, Heading Home, \$4 million in federal Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program funds through the federal stimulus program. About \$18 million was available statewide.

In December, the housing partnership visited 47 families living in the Charles River Inn in Brighton. The agencies then went to work with families sheltered in motels in Boston, Brighton, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Malden, Quincy and Waltham.

Danvers sits outside the housing partnership's program area, but many of the families living in Danvers motels are from Boston and the region north of Boston, making them eligible for the program.

Families who come from outside the partnership's 30-community region will still be interviewed.

"We will do the intake and assessment," Norris said, "and we will work to connect them to the appropriate agency."

Staff writer Ethan Forman can be reached at 978-338-2673 or by e-mail at eforman@salemnews.com.

Copyright © 1999-2010 cnhi, inc.