



Boston agency to help Danvers homeless

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Danvers —

About a dozen staffers from the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership came to the Days Inn in Danvers recently to begin interviewing 38 homeless families.

In the days ahead, the staffers would head off to other Danvers motels to interview the rest of the 96 homeless families housed by the state for lack of affordable housing elsewhere.

Most of these families aren't from Danvers originally, and their presence had added an unanticipated cost to the school budget, as well as to the Danvers Community Council and People to People Food Pantry.

More importantly, motel living is hardly a long-term solution to the problem of finding affordable, decent housing.

"We're stepping in to help," said Noreen Kearney, an MBHP manager, who rounded up the staff and sent them on their way to interview interested residents on Thursday, Jan. 14.

Inis Martinez and her children, a boy, Kyle Rucker Jr., 8, and a daughter, Jakyla Rucker, 5, moved to the Days Inn Motel in Danvers some months ago, from Lynn, she explained while waiting for the agency's social worker to arrive.

Kyle is bused back to his old school in Lynn. He was visiting his grandmother in Lynn this afternoon. Jakyla goes to Thorpe School. Jakyla was busy doing her homework.

"She loves school," said her mother proudly.

Martinez had an apartment and a job as a private care assistant, she said. She went into the homes of elderly or disabled people to help them. But, her hours were cut until there were none, she said.

For a while, she went to school to become a dental assistant, but it was too expensive. She hopes to go to a dental assistance program in Chelsea to finish, and she's applied for financial aid.

She talked about how wonderful the Thorpe School is and how Jakyla's teacher has been so kind. Santa Claus even dropped off some presents with the teacher, Martinez said.

But, Jakyla wasn't so sure about that. She wasn't so sure there was a Santa Claus at all.

"Sure there is," said Martinez, explaining that it was just a lack of a real home that kept him from coming this year.

And, she held back her tears with difficulty, as her little girl turned back to her schoolwork.

Danvers isn't in the MBHP service area; however, many of the families that have moved to Danvers are, she said.

The agency, whose motto is "Everyone Deserves a Place to Call Home," applied for a grant advertised by the state Department of Housing and Community Development. The source of funds is the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, a.k.a. stimulus money, and a particular program to "rapidly re-house" homeless families, Kearney explained. There are 1,000 such families statewide now, down from 1,100. Danvers had 108 families in November, and the number has dropped to 96.

Four agencies won grants: Housing Assistance Program (HAP), in Hamden and Hampshire counties; Father Bill's Place, in Quincy; the city of Worcester; and MBHP.

MBHP will give a qualifying family up to \$1,000 towards its monthly rent for one year, if the family can pitch in one-third of the total rent, Kearney said.

The staffers were looking for people with a good work history, she added.

"This is a one-year, temporary rental subsidy, to help people get on their feet and back into stable housing," she said. "We want to help as many people as possible; we just don't want to set people up for failure."

The agency would also connect people to job training programs and other agencies that might help individuals get back on track.

Motel manager John Jalbert said the number of homeless families had dropped from 70 to 38. It's a loss of income for the motel, but he's interested in what's best for the families.

And, the numbers might climb again, both he and Kearney said.

The decisions about these families won't be made for some weeks, said Beth Wagner, communications manager for MBHP. An apartment must be found, a lease negotiated, and the apartment inspected.

"We're working on it," she said.

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