

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A new model for ending homelessness, one family at a time

WALTHAM – In a single room, an entire family must live, cook, eat, sleep, do homework ... and wait.

More than 900 families across Massachusetts are living in one-room motel shelters, placed there by the state because homeless shelters are overflowing. Many are victims of the economy, having lost their homes to the unemployment line. Others are victims of domestic violence, having lost their homes in their need to escape their abusers.

Regardless of the circumstances that led them to homelessness, the families all have one thing in common – they are waiting. Waiting to be placed in a shelter. Waiting for assistance to “navigate the system.” Waiting for a job to become available. Waiting for a home.

Their waits can be long – a stay in a motel shelter can last several months with no guarantee of a better housing situation at the end of the stay. However, the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership is changing this paradigm for many of the families. A successful MBHP pilot program has been scaled up to help scores of families housed in motel shelters move to real homes.

On Jan. 26, MBHP visited with 63 shelter families living at Waltham’s Cumberland Inn, Holiday Inn and Home Suites Inn, collecting information and assessing their status and needs. The team identified about 25 families that it hopes to move out of the emergency shelter and into a real homes using short-term financial assistance.

“Can you imagine a better way to start the new year?” said MBHP Executive Director Chris Norris. “Our No. 1 priority right now is to locate for these families safe, stable housing that is affordable as quickly as possible.”

The Waltham intake process mirrors that of MBHP’s pilot program launched in August, when staff member and volunteers met with 76 homeless families at the Cambridge Gateway Inn motel to help match families with available apartments. The team’s goal was to identify families who, with a small amount of cash assistance for a finite time, could transition quickly from homelessness to housing.

MBHP staff members identified 25 Gateway families who were best positioned for rapid re-housing using a government-funded, limited emergency assistance program; to date 22 of them have been housed. Once housed, the families works toward debt reduction, better employment and other financial strategies to sustain the housing long term after the financial assistance ends.

In late September, MBHP and a partnering agency, Heading Home, were notified they had been selected by the Commonwealth to receive and administer more than \$4 million in federal Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing (HPRP) funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. These funds are targeted to rapid re-housing and stabilization; MBHP and Heading Home are bringing the Gateway project to scale to work with families sheltered in motels in Boston, Brighton, Brookline, Cambridge, Chelsea, Malden, Quincy and Waltham.

With nearly 1,000 Massachusetts families in motel shelters now, the successful MBHP pilot program and its resulting scale-up won’t put an immediate end to homelessness. However, housing roughly one-third of the families in hotel shelters is a start.

Together, MBHP and Heading Home plan to identify as many as 300 families for rapid re-housing and to use intensive housing search, time-limited rental assistance, case management and other tools to enable these families to decrease dependence on public support and to become fully independent in a relatively short period of time.

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Additionally, MBHP and Heading Home are working with local housing authorities, shelters and housing supports resources to help other motel-sheltered families who need more intensive assistance beyond the rapid re-housing model to obtain housing. Using focused case management, interdisciplinary resources and supports, job training, mentoring, and options to accumulate assets through a matched savings plan, MBHP and Heading Home will work with the balance of the families in motel shelters to secure housing.

The goal is to empty the motels of all sheltered families within 24 months.

For additional information, please contact MBHP Communications Coordinator Beth Wagner at (617) 425-6691.

MBHP is the state's largest regional provider of rental housing voucher assistance. We serve homeless, elderly, disabled, and low- and moderate-income individuals and families. Our region spans Boston and 29 surrounding communities.

Our mission is to ensure that the region's low- and moderate-income individuals and families have choice and mobility in finding and retaining decent affordable housing; all of our programs and initiatives are designed to encourage housing stability, increase economic self-sufficiency, and enhance quality of the lives of those we serve. To achieve our mission and to promote efficient service delivery, we work collaboratively with a broad array of service providers and neighborhood-based organizations.

We believe that everyone deserves a place to call home.

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