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Local agency receives financial award to continue fight against homelessness

By Aaron Crear

A Somerville based community development organization has been named as one of twelve local agencies to receive financial awards to continue their missions to fight homelessness in collaboration with four other local agencies. The collaborative, which is lead by the Somerville Community Corporation, was given the \$50,000 award by the Metro Boston Network to End Homelessness. The initiative is part of the Metro Boston Housing Partnership's efforts to prevent homelessness in the Greater Boston area. The organization provides support programs to individuals and families who are in danger of becoming or are already left without housing.

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A collaborative, which is lead by the Somerville Community Corporation, was given the \$50,000 award by the Metro Boston Network to end homelessness. -Photo Courtesy of Somerville Community Corporation

"The Somerville Tenancy Preservation Collaborative developed a strong proposal because it is cooperative in nature and consistent with the mission of the Network to coordinate efforts," said MBHP Executive Director Chris Norris. "It is a joint initiative among Somerville Community Corporation, which is the lead agency, and Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, Community Action Agency of Somerville, Somerville Homeless Coalition, and Somerville Mental Health Association." The group's main focus is to provide assistance to people before they reach the point of eviction. "It is our hope that this initiative will create a uniformed system where landlords could make direct referrals to our organizations and we could work with these families to get services and resources in place at a very early stage before they are in crisis that would assist them in not only maintaining their housing but addressing the areas that are preventing them from becoming self-sufficient", said SCC staff member, Stacey Pires.

The SCC provides assistance in several areas including financial assistance for delinquent rent and utility payments, mediation and negotiation with landlords, housing search and placements, and personal budgeting and credit management. The collaborative applied for the MBHP's funding to enhance its already extensive offerings. "A lot of these residents had very large arrears when they finally walked through our doors that caused us to have to leverage additional funds and services through other agencies just to stabilize. After many conversations we decided that we could provide direct service at these sites so that residents could access our services and receive help before getting to the stage of eviction of to a point where they could not help themselves", said Pires. The funds awarded will be directly used to aid residents of Somerville. It is the aim of the collaborative to impact recipients prior to shelters becoming their only option.

The Metro Boston Network gave out awards to 12 organizations totaling \$470,000. In addition, the Network also has \$465,729 in emergency flexible funds available to the agencies and partners to leverage staff services and help residents obtain and retain housing. Once the contracts are finalize and accepted they will last 18 months beginning on July 1, 2009.

Interactive Poll: Which of these Squares in Somerville do find to be the hardest to drive through? Please select one: Davis Square, Teele Square, Union Square, Ball Square, Magoun Square. Includes Vote and View Results buttons.

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