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Homeless health-care center nears opening - Stimulus provides funding for facility that Harbor Homes has long sought to open

Telegraph, The (Nashua, NH) - Tuesday, June 9, 2009

Author: PATRICK MEIGHAN ; Staff Writer

NASHUA - Federal stimulus money, which to this point has seemed theoretical and nebulous, is starting to produce tangible results in the city.

Just ask Kathi Fortin. She is the program director for a new health-care center for homeless adults and families that is scheduled to open June 29.

Fortin's first day on the job was Monday and her salary is being paid with federal stimulus funds.

Harbor Homes Inc. has used part of a \$930,000 grant to hire two of four staff members, including Fortin, for the health-care center that will be housed at **Harbor Homes**, 45 High St.

"It's a brand-new program. It's something we've been working toward and applying to for the past seven years," said Carol Furlong, vice president of operations for **Harbor Homes**, an agency that provides housing and other services to the homeless.

But until now, **Harbor Homes** hasn't been able to obtain funding and was told just last fall that again there would be no money available for the center, Furlong said.

But then Congress passed and the president signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, channeling stimulus dollars to the states. Part of the money in New Hampshire was targeted to create jobs for health-care centers to help the homeless.

The \$930,000 grant will fund Nashua's new center for two years. An open house for the public to view the center will be June 18, according to **Harbor Homes** officials.

Also hired was Dr. Dana O'Shea, who will be the medical director. **Harbor Homes** will soon hire a case manager and a nurse practitioner, Furlong said.

By 2011, the center is expected to service 1,000 to 1,200 men, women and children, Fortin said.

The focus will be on preventative and primary care, said Fortin, who helped write the grant and had been working for the Bi-State Primary Care Association, a nonprofit agency that supports health-care centers in New Hampshire and Vermont.

The health-care center will be a walk-in clinic for the homeless. It will also include an enabling program to help patients apply for Medicaid and other assistance programs for which they qualify, Fortin said.

Health care has been a problem for homeless adults and families, particularly because they have no health insurance, Fortin said.

"It's difficult to get. Oftentimes, they'll have to go through the emergency room," Fortin said.


After the two-year grant is up, Fortin hopes the center will continue to be funded through the Health Resources and Services Administration under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"There is no guarantee," Fortin said.

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