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BRISTOL COMMUNITY

Community groups in New Britain, Bristol and three nearby town aid 44 homeless young people

By DON STACOM
HARTFORD COURANT | AUG 07, 2019 | 5:24 PM | BRISTOL



Center for Children's Advocacy

As a high-intensity 100-day campaign winds down, community groups in five central Connecticut cities and towns report they've lined up housing for 44 homeless young people.

The goal was more than merely arranging emergency shelter or short-term housing, so organizers also set up ways for the young homeless to get medical care, job training or perhaps resume their education.

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"Our goal was to house them and set up the connections so they can stay there and not slip back into homelessness," said Stacey Violante Cote, director of the Homeless Youth Advocacy Project at the Hartford-based Center for Children's Advocacy.

The work means 44 men and women between the ages of 18 and 24 will get moderate-term apartments or rooms. Most were living in New Britain or Bristol, but a few came from Berlin, Plainville and Southington, organizers said.

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"This is a testament to the strong community partnerships we have here in our community, and region," New Britain Mayor Erin Stewart said. "This work is a continuation of our Building Hope Together efforts, which have been ongoing for more than a decade to ensure that no one goes homeless."

Mid-sized and large cities throughout Connecticut have homeless populations, and many are easy to spot: Some create makeshift camps in woods or other remote spots, or perhaps just use old sleeping bags or even rags as bedding and sleep under overpasses or in abandoned buildings. But the younger homeless are often a different situation, Cote said.

"What's difficult is that homeless youth are invisible – they are sleeping on friends' couches, moving from place to place, not staying anywhere very long," she said. "They often do not consider themselves homeless or don't like to share that they're experiencing homelessness."

To focus on that group, community organizations and municipal agencies came together May 1 to run the "Reaching Home - Ending Homelessness 100-Day Challenge." They worked with schools, social workers and others to spread the message that help was available, and sought out referrals from the 211 social service line run by the state and the United Way.

"We partnered with the YWCA to provide access to showers and places to do laundry. Once you're providing something young people in crisis need, they're more likely to welcome help and you're more likely to be able to intervene," Cote said.

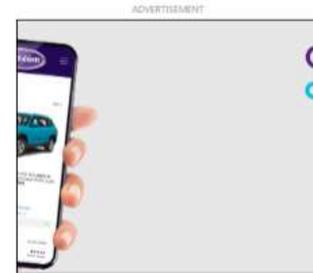
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Among the organizations participating were the Melville Charitable Trust, Partnership for Strong Communities, the city of New Britain's community services department, the Salvation Army, the American Savings Foundation, the OIC of New Britain, Community Health Resources, the Friendship Service Center, Prudence Crandall, Journey Home, the United Way, the state Department of Housing, the Main Street Community Foundation and the Human Resources Agency of New Britain.

Representatives met weekly at the YWCA's East Side Community Center to collaborate, and gathered state aid and private to pay for rent, down payments and even busfare to ensure young people could get to appointments for health, education and job services. The goal was to reach 40 young homeless adults before Thursday.

"The 100-day challenge is all about setting audacious goals that you're not really sure you can meet," Cote said. "Under healthy competitive pressure, you ask how can you do things differently than you've ever done before?"

Organizers are holding a free community-wide event Saturday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the OIC offices at 114 North St. to celebrate. There will be music, ice cream, hamburgers, hot dogs and more.



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