

# Homelessness doesn't end with winter

As days get longer and warmer, it's too easy to forget about this 365-day problem

BY KAREN BOORSHTEIN

A flurry of newspaper articles and television coverage this winter highlighted the increase of homelessness in both Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Now, as the winter draws to a close, the snow melts and the first warm days of spring are upon us, it's easy to forget that homelessness is a 365-day-a-year, 24/7 issue that many agencies and volunteers work tirelessly to address on a year-round basis.

Homelessness is devastating. It destroys the fabric of family life and is particularly damaging to children, who are torn from familiar surroundings and find their education interrupt-

ed and lose friendships. Adults, as well, are separated from family, friends and their community support systems.

In today's economic climate, it is not unusual to have someone who is homeless while still working. Individuals and families who have never experienced homelessness are losing their housing and entering the shelter system for the first time.

On any given night in Suffolk County, there are close to 300 families with almost 1,000 children residing in emergency shelters. There are additionally about 200 single adults and childless couples living in emergency shelters. As of Jan. 15, Nassau had more than 100

homeless families, and almost 250 single adults in shelters.

But these numbers drastically underestimate the actual number of people experiencing homelessness, because they don't include people sleeping on the streets or "doubled-up" with family and friends.

Long Island is fortunate to have numerous caring and supportive agencies that run programs for homeless families and individuals. But with financial problems at the state and federal levels, funding these programs becomes an ever-increasing challenge — especially at a time when the numbers of homeless are ever increasing.

The stimulus act provided Suffolk County with a unique opportunity to form partnerships between government and nonprofits, to provide assistance to households at risk of experiencing homelessness.

The community development agencies in Islip and Babylon, as well as the Suffolk County Consortium and the Suffolk County Department of Social Services, have partnered with my organization — Family Service League — and the Economic Opportunity Council to provide almost \$3 million of assistance through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program. About \$6 million in such aid has been provided in Nassau County.

These programs are designed to reduce or eliminate emergency housing stays by streamlining access to relocation assistance, affordable housing, rent subsidies and other support services, either before there is a permanent loss of rental housing or immediately upon an individual or family's entry into emergency housing. Homeowners fac-

ing foreclosure can access neighborhood prevention resources — cooperative efforts between government and the private sector that have already helped hundreds of families.

As a community, we are all deeply concerned for the safety of individuals and families who find themselves living in dangerous outdoor conditions in makeshift shelters. When the sun shines and the days and nights grow warmer, we cannot forget that homelessness is a year-round crisis for the families and individuals who face this tragedy.



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