



413-658-0060

Jessie's House News

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Community Resources Improve a Family's Outlook

On a cool September afternoon Jessica Domenech arrived at Jessie's House with her two sons, three-year-old Daniel and one-year-old Devin. Jessica remembers being nervous about her new surroundings; Amherst is a different community from Springfield, where she had been living and from the Bronx in New York City, where she grew up.

While completing her intake for the shelter, Jessica was asked by her caseworker what three major goals she had for her family. Jessica responded without hesitation, "Go back to school so I can study for my GED, get housing and find a job as a Certified Nurse Assistant."

Jessica's long-time partner, Jennifer Feliciano, soon came to Amherst to join the family. In October 2005 they had a beautiful wedding ceremony and started their journey as a newly married couple. Both struggled with reading and writing, and were frustrated when reading mail and completing paperwork. They began attending the Amherst Adult Learning Center just down the street from the shelter and within weeks saw a difference in their abilities.

Jennifer was enthusiastic about the changes she was making. "I have so much more confidence now than I did before," she said. "When I went to school as a kid in the Bronx, I did not have the one-on-one attention that I get at school now and I am doing so well." Jennifer is excited about continuing her learning and aspires to do construction or electrical work, a familiar field for her. She would love to work as an apprentice for someone and learn about the trade while she goes to school. As for Jessica, she now has no problem completing four to five applications for housing a week and saves over half of her income every month towards future housing expenses.

Both feel that working closely with the community resources, the shelter staff and the housing advocate from New England Farm Workers Council has helped them to focus on their goals and work through their frustrations. Jennifer explained, "It is really hard to have to celebrate your children's birthdays and your marriage while in shelter, because you want to be doing those things in your own home. But we have met a lot of great people while at Jessie's House who encourage you to do your best."

"Right now we are making future plans towards obtaining our own apartment, continuing our education, and finding jobs that we will both enjoy," Jessica added. "It's amazing how much we have done since we first arrived at Jessie's House."

Jessica and Jennifer want to thank the following community resources for their support: Amherst Family Practice, WIC, Amherst Adult Learning Center, CDI Head Start, Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, and Peter Pan Bus Lines.

Why Are More and More Families Homelessness?

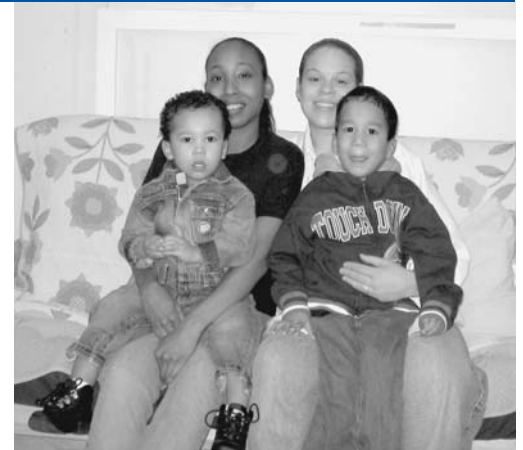
Families with children are the fastest growing segment among the homeless, according to the U.S. Conference of Mayors. Massachusetts is no exception. Families are having a hard time keeping a roof over their heads because:

- This is the third least affordable state in the country for renters. Tenants accessing the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program have a gross annual income of \$10,273 or \$856 per month. Yet, the fair market value rent in the state for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1,138.
- Among renters in the extremely low-income category*, 51.3% spend 50% or more of their incomes on rent.

Because of this dire lack of affordable housing, the state's shelters are at least 95% full on any given night and house approximately 1,250 families, including 2,700 children.

What can you do? Urge your state legislators to restore \$10 million to the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program and fund it at \$36.3 million for 2007. This would restore 1,200 vouchers that have been lost, maintain our current stock of affordable housing and add new units of affordable housing.

* Extremely low income households have incomes of 30% or less of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's median income limit for their area; in 2005 in Hampshire County, this income level was \$21,400 for a family of four.



Wish List of Volunteers

Jessie's House families benefit from interaction with volunteers from the community at large. Volunteers fulfill many roles and functions, from serving on our Community Board to teaching classes for our residents to redecorating the rooms in which our families live.

If you want to get involved with an organization that makes a big difference in people's lives; Jessie's House is the place for you! We need volunteers to:

- Serve on our Community Board
- Help with fund-raising events
- Provide childcare
- Serve as volunteer coordinator
- Building or yard maintenance
- Provide classes in topics such as:
 - Financial literacy
 - Literacy or English as a Second Language
 - Cooking and/or nutrition
 - Parenting
 - Arts and crafts
- Run a mothers' group
- Serve as a translator

Currently, we need childcare for the children at Jessie's House while their parents are at work or attending school or job training. If you have a few hours a week you could volunteer, this would be a great way to get involved.

To learn more, please call Jane Banks at 413-658-0060.



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Help Assure Adequate Funding For Emergency Shelter Programs

The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) is designated by the state to provide emergency shelter and housing assistance and other services to families who become homeless in Massachusetts and who fall below certain income guidelines. In FY06, DTA funded 80 emergency family shelters and related services with a total capacity of 1,305 units.¹ These facilities are at least 95% full on any given night of the year.

- [What Does the Emergency Assistance \(EA\) Family Shelter Program Do?](#)

Emergency shelter provides homeless families with a safe place to stay and an opportunity to access resources for permanent housing. The EA family shelter program is a closed referral system whereby DTA determines eligibility. Upon referral, providers' work to keep families housed. If that is not possible, shelter is made available immediately. Once placed, families receive other services that address emergency shelter and stabilization needs and also help families find permanent, affordable housing and live self-sufficient lives. Specific services offered include case management, housing search, landlord negotiation, health care, development of life skills, job training, education and financial and budget training.

- [What Is the Need?](#)

As the number of homeless families accessing shelter continues to grow; in fact, families are the fastest growing sector of the homeless population. We must maintain adequate funding to ensure that children and their parents who are homeless have a safe and adequate place to stay. Since 1989, the state has increased family shelter operating budgets by only 2.4%. (A 5% increase in 1999 was offset by a 5% decrease in 2003.) During the same time, the Consumer Price Index has risen by 61% in the Northeast.² Shelters have experienced sharp increases in the cost of fuel³ for both heating and transportation, health insurance, building maintenance, food and liability insurance. These increased costs not only make maintaining shelter difficult, but also impact the ability to train and retain qualified staff. In FY06, a 10% operating budget increase was provided for shelters housing individuals, but shelters housing families did not receive a similar increase. Family shelters are seeking the same consideration from the state for FY07. To maintain current standards, shelters and housing search providers are seeking a 10% increase to their operating budgets for FY07.

- [Please Reach Out to Your Legislators](#)

Please call or e-mail your legislators and ask them to make the following addition to the FY07 budget: Insert into line item 4403-2120 the following language: "for the purpose of providing a 10% increase to the operating budgets of family shelters and related homeless family pro-grams," and increase the line item by 5.5 million.

By supporting this language, you will help assure that Jessie's House and the state's other family shelters can better provide families with much needed shelter and services.

¹ Emergency shelter capacity as of February 10, 2006 includes congregate shelter and scattered site units.

² US department of Labor. (2206). Bureau of Labor Statistics data, 1989-2005. Nationally, the CPI has increased by 56%.

³ According to the U.S. Department of Labor, between 1989 and 2005, the cost of electricity has increased by 31% and fuel oil has increased by 146%.

