

# Homelessness in MetroWest: You can make a difference

FRAMINGHAM —

What do the following people have in common? Joseph is a single, 80-year-old with signs of dementia, who has been living in the same subsidized housing apartment for the past 14 years. Maria is a 60-year-old grandmother who has custody of her two grandchildren and all the expenses that are associated with that added responsibility. Catherine is a working single mother with three young children. Roger is a 47-year-old mentally challenged worker in a local chain store; his brother used to take care of paying his bills until he recently died. Answer: All of these individuals received eviction notices from the courts within the past year. They are just a few of the many individuals and families who have faced this situation in MetroWest and throughout the country. Our economic crisis affects those with limited financial resources the hardest.

During the past six years, MetroWest Outreach Connection, an all-volunteer 501c3 non-profit organization whose mission is to prevent homelessness and to provide financial assistance to victims of domestic violence, has been privileged to be able to work with many foundations, houses of worship, organizations and individuals who share our mission. While these donors are known to many people in MetroWest, I would venture a guess that a smaller percentage of the region's residents know how much of a commitment these organizations and individuals have made to prevent 645 households that include 1,694 individuals from losing their housing.

How many people know that at least half of the women and their children now in shelters for the homeless are there because they are victims of domestic violence? Thanks to the three grants we have received from MetroWest Community Health Care Foundation, we have already been able to provide financial assistance to 55 of these victims in the last three years. With the exception of the Community Development Block Grants we have received from the Framingham Housing and Urban Development grants for the past six years and a similar grant from the City of Marlborough, the rest of our funds are from private sources.

The need for funds to help these most needy residents of MetroWest can be overwhelming if we allow it to be. The alternative is to find ways to help - one family or individual at a time. We recently received a grant from the Framingham Rotary Club for \$1,000. That sum was awarded to help one Framingham family avoid eviction. A relatively new organization based in Waltham, Small Can Be Big, established a website that posts stories about families facing a financial crisis, usually eviction or foreclosure. The organization has established a program that enables individuals to go on to their website and donate to help one or more of these families. People can see what a difference they are making to meet the needs described. MetroWest Outreach Connection has already received funding from this site to prevent three families from eviction. The SCBB website is [www.smallcanbebig.org](http://www.smallcanbebig.org).

The Foundation for MetroWest connects philanthropic opportunity with demonstrated need in MetroWest. They promote philanthropy in the region, help donors maximize the impact of their local giving, serve as a resource for local nonprofit organizations, and enhance the quality of life for all of our citizens. They have been providing funds to help our clients for the past five years. For more information you can visit their website at [www.FoundationforMetroWest.org](http://www.FoundationforMetroWest.org).

MetroWest Outreach Connection will be holding its seventh annual Walk to Prevent Homelessness on Sunday, Sept. 26, 2010, at noon, on the Framingham Center Common. Information for those interested in walking, sponsoring and donating will be posted on our website by mid-July. The website is [www.mwoconnection.org](http://www.mwoconnection.org). Please take the time to visit our site to see the list of the foundations, organizations and houses of worship that have supported us recently. These are just a few of the options that are open to donors who share our mission.

The state and federal governments continue to seek solutions that will prevent homelessness. In November 2009, the United Way of Tri-County became the convening agency for the MetroWest Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness. Our region has joined the other nine regional networks across Massachusetts. While their initial efforts have been encouraging, available funding, additional rent subsidies and the need for more low-income housing continue to remain formidable hurdles.

Most of the foundations in Massachusetts that support homeless prevention programs do so in specific geographic locations. The vast majority fund social service organizations in Greater Boston. For some reason, MetroWest is not seen as a region with many residents whose incomes hover around the poverty level. That perception has to change if organizations, like ours, are going to be able to raise sufficient funds to meet the increasing needs of families facing eviction and foreclosure.

It will take the collective efforts of all residents of the MetroWest region to win the fight to eradicate homelessness. You may not be able to make a donation, but can you decide to participate in our walk? Could you enlist some of your family members, friends, neighbors and colleagues to make pledges? MetroWest Outreach Connection and these other organizations need your support. What we do benefits the most needy families and individuals in our region. Please consider making a commitment to help us today.

*Michael Dineen is the Treasurer of MetroWest Outreach Connection.*