

Future Meeting:  
Monday  
February 9, 2004  
7:30 pm  
Plymouth Church  
New  
Members Welcome

# MetroWest Outreach Connection

Issue 6

**Who we are:** The MetroWest Outreach Connection is a group dedicated to advocate and respond to the needs of the disadvantaged in our society, including the homeless. We coordinate the efforts of many organizations to effectively work toward this common goal.

## F.I.A.T. Summit



On October 18<sup>th</sup> Faith Into Action Together, a program of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, gathered active F.I.A.T. members, diverse organizations and faith communities to develop a cohesive, educational and advocacy campaign to influence federal funding support for affordable housing for the lowest income households and homelessness prevention programs. This effort is part of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless' *Housing Matters Project*.

Approximately 90 participants were in attendance and were treated to a series of speakers and panelists that provided a continuous

stream of ideas, achievements, and suggestions. For a listing of the speakers and other information, please visit the following web site:



[www.PLYMOUTH01701.ORG](http://www.PLYMOUTH01701.ORG)

The F.I.A.T. Summit provided an

opportunity for faith communities to join together to:



- Discuss current political and economic factors influencing the funding of affordable housing and homelessness prevention programs especially in light of the state's current fiscal crisis.
- Learn about the federal Consolidated Plan and Public Housing Authority Plan and understand how to organize locally to have a voice to shape these plans
- Hear how people have influenced local affordable housing policies
- Gather ideas from best practices in creating affordable housing and homeless prevention programs.
- Learned about the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless' public policy campaigns for 2003 -2004

The day was energized with panel discussions on Opportunities for Action: National, State and Local Level, and Best Practices. There were also breakout groups where discussions focused on local involvement in shaping the Consolidated and Public Housing Authority Plans and what lies ahead for the next two years in F.I.A.T.'s ongoing work with faith communities.

A report of the breakout groups will be made available as soon as possible.



### Key Dates to Mark on the Calendar:

- Jan 28 - Letter to Editor Team Meeting; Dinner at 5:30 Meeting from 6:00-7:30PM at Mass. Coalition for the Homeless 300 Congress Street 5th Floor of Children Museum
- Feb 9 - Next MetroWest Outreach Connection Meeting
- Feb 23 - Lobby Day



## HECH-An example of working together

This is a success story about how churches and communities came together to help others. They are still operating today with a much larger program than described here. It is the model we will hope to emulate in our homeless prevention program.

**1990 The Harwich Ecumenical Council for the Homeless (HECH)** is formed by clergy and lay people from seven Harwich churches for the purpose of providing housing for the homeless families with children.

**1992 HECH's Homeless Prevention Program** is initiated, to prove the theory that homelessness can be prevented at a significantly reduced cost through early intervention. Another 21 families are housed in HECH's Housing the Homeless Program. And HECH files successful legislation to create a special homeless program, based on the HECH model, for Cape Cod. Nearly 600 families have been assisted with this program Cape wide.

**1994 HECH's Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention Program** begins in response to a number of families facing foreclosure and seeking our assistance. Although the cases are more complicated than housing a

family or preventing homelessness, HECH has helped 16 families with this program. Normally, solutions require a reasonable mortgage lender, a family with good prospects of financial recovery, good mortgage to asset value in the property, a relatively low mortgage payment, and networking with other agencies to assemble the necessary resources to accomplish a solution. The overall cost to HECH for this program is less per family than housing a family already homeless.

### Thank You Letter

*Dear HECH:*

*I just wish to say thank you for your help with my homelessness. I don't think saying thanks says enough, but I don't know how else to put it. Maybe thank the good Lord you were there for me and others could say it a little better. I don't know what I would have done if you people hadn't come along.*

*There's a saying it's always darkest before the dawn, and boy am I glad that you were there to be "the dawn."*

*Thank you and the Lord.*

S.N. (a single mom as she was leaving the HECH program)

### The Governor's Executive Commission for Homeless Coordination

#### Draft Issues/Recommendations

(FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES ONLY)

Need of an Early Warning System: Too often there are early signals that indicate an individual or family could be at risk of losing housing. If these early signals were picked up on, we may be able to provide information/referral to services that would prevent eventual homelessness.

Need Better Assessment/Identification of Barriers: When someone becomes homeless, there is not a standardized, clear assessment of the issues that the individual or family may be dealing with (e.g., domestic violence, substance abuse, DSS involvement, mental illness, disability, etc.) Consequently it is difficult to determine the appropriate services to coordinate for the family.

Maintain and Enhance Local (Community) Connections and Ties: The need to remove someone from their community to shelter them is disruptive and oftentimes costly (e.g., increased transportation costs to the educational system; leaving employment due to distance, etc.).

Ensure Adequate Access to Services: We recognize that not everyone needs services. But due to the issues some individuals/families are facing, there is inadequate access to the "mainstream" services offered by EOHS and other systems.

Need More Time: Given the tight timeframe of the Commission and need to come up with a report within 90 days, the themes and issues identified above are the beginning point of a discussion to refashion the current emergency shelter system. We need to make sure that there exists a formalized structure to further develop these and other ideas.

Shared Responsibility: We recognize the shared responsibility we all have (the state, local community, and the homeless themselves) have in ameliorating and eliminating homelessness, as we know it. In order to reallocate resources, all of us are required to participate in this shared responsibility as we move to a more housing-responsive system.

## New Year...New Name

The original concept of the MetroWest Outreach Coalition was to coordinate efforts in providing a broad level of outreach to disadvantaged people in the MetroWest area. Thus far we have focused on the most pressing need of providing support for the homeless families in motels. We have been very successful in this limited endeavor. We now want to begin to expand our outreach to include longer range solutions to the problems of the disadvantaged. To reflect this wider effort in a more closely coordinated way we have chosen the name **MetroWest Outreach Connection**.

We deem the most urgent need in providing longer range solutions to be the development of a homeless prevention program for this area. State and federal funding for homeless prevention

programs has been either eliminated or drastically cut. The result is that many homeless people can not get housing only because they are unable to provide the initial costs (first and last month rent). Others who have housing and fall into temporary hard times lose their housing because of the lack of a rental arrearage program. We hope to begin to address these needs through establishment of a non profit organization.

There are many other needs to be met in the area. These will be evaluated as we have the resources to address them. In the meanwhile our present support to the homeless will continue. Our hope is to continue to increase the involvement of more organizations in all of these endeavors.

## M.W.O.C. Hall of Fame Spotlight

**Sister Linda** – Thanks you for your never ending commitment to helping the homeless and for your involvement in organizing the F.I.A.T. Summit.

**Valerie Gaines** – Thank you for your efforts coordinating between the Mass. Coalition for the Homeless and Citizens Bank.

**Citizens Bank**– Thank you for your generosity.

**Roche Brothers** – Thank you for the breakfast donations at the F.I.A.T. Summit.

**Wellesley United Methodist Church** – Thank you for your very generous donation.