

New regional network to tackle homelessness



Allan Jung/Daily News staff

Lt. Gov. Tim Murray stops by United Way in Framingham to kick off the new MetroWest Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness.

By Abby Jordan/Daily News staff
[The MetroWest Daily News](#)

FRAMINGHAM — Just a few years ago, Matt Hernandez was homeless, climbing into Dumpsters to sleep, covering himself with their contents to keep warm, or taking shelter in freight cars to spend the cold nights.

Hernandez is homeless no longer because of help he got finding a home from South Middlesex Opportunity Council and the Tempo Young Adult Resource Center.

"You have no idea how much I cherish it - being able to wake up and go to the refrigerator and get some milk," he said.

Hernandez told his story yesterday to Lt. Gov. Tim Murray and members of a newly created regional network of the state's Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH) for the MetroWest area.

"You're giving a voice to why we're here," Murray told Hernandez.

The state created the regional pilot networks to better coordinate and focus on securing permanent housing for the homeless, ultimately to lessen the need for emergency shelters.

Yesterday's meeting, formally kicking off the MetroWest region network, was held at United Way of Tri-County, designated by the state in November as the convening agency for MetroWest.

The United Way, partnered with SMOC, has established a leadership council of local officials and leaders in education, nonprofit organizations, businesses and other areas to continue work helping the homeless find housing.

Murray's visit marked the formal kick-off of the MetroWest network, whose work began last fall. In the first three months, the network helped 79 families move from shelters into permanent housing.

"The premise is, a person cannot succeed in school, succeed at work, and stay out of crime if they don't have a steady, stable home to live in," said Paul Mina, United Way of Tri-County president.

A \$350,000 grant from the Fireman Foundation is funding outreach workers and direct services for those transitioning into permanent housing, Mina said.

While the United Way, SMOC and other local agencies have been using a housing-first model, the state's pilot program of creating the regional networks to focus on eliminating emergency shelter use through permanent housing gives that work legitimacy as a best practice, Mina said.

It also provides additional resources to combat homelessness while allowing for a deeper collaboration between agencies, businesses, educators and officials, said Jim Cuddy, SMOC's executive director.

"It's a group of people coming together to tackle the issue in a forum that's never really existed before," Cuddy said. "It's about having additional resources to help us with housing, and an increased number of stakeholders that are interested in the issue."

Murray said he is committed to bringing local agencies and the state together around solving homelessness.

"We want to make sure every region in the state has stakeholders committed to meeting regionally and working toward collaborative solutions," he said. "By combining the public and private sectors we can be a lot more flexible and can stabilize families so they're not entering the shelter system."