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## **Grant to help the homeless begin again**

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**WORCESTER** — James Welsh grew up around downtown Main Street and pledged to himself not to ever wind up homeless.

“I’ll never turn out like that,” Mr. Welsh said today outside the People in Peril Shelter at 701 Main St.

Despite his best intentions — he worked for 35 years plating metal in the electrical industry, he owned a duplex in Warren and he was married — Mr. Welsh sought shelter at the PIP shelter for months after the house was foreclosed on, he lost his job, and he and his wife separated.

“I thought I’d never be able to get a home again,” said Mr. Welch, 51.

Mr. Welsh was on hand today for the announcement of a \$437,000 grant from the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts to Community Healthlink. The agency serves as the administrator of the collaborative project with the Central Mass Housing Alliance, Dismas House, Henry Lee Willis Community Center, Jeremiah's Inn, South Middlesex Opportunity Council and People in Peril. With the latest award, the foundation has committed \$1.6 million since 2007 to end homelessness.

The grant finances the Home Again program, a housing-first-style intervention program modeled after similar efforts in other cities and modified by a coalition of homeless services providers in the Worcester area to move from a traditional shelter-based service into a home-based service.

“Only home ends homelessness,” said Janice B. Yost, president and CEO of the Health Foundation, as she announced the grant at the PIP shelter this morning.

While at the PIP, Mr. Welsh was assigned a caseworker, and he met Frank Schneider, 55, who also was homeless. Home Again is helping the two men make the transition to sharing an apartment.

“Before that happened, my life was pretty straightforward,” Mr. Schneider said. He worked for 38 years as an industrial engineer. “About two years ago my wife left me and I fell into addiction and alcohol. ... I loved my wife very much ... I stayed at the PIP from a year ago June until November, and then my caseworker helped me find a room.”

At the time, both Mr. Welsh and Mr. Schneider said they agreed to the living in the temporary single rooms with the understanding they would be interviewed every week by the Boston University School of

Public Health.

“In January, Jimmy and I were the first two tenants of the Home Again program,” Mr. Schneider said.

“It's working out excellent,” Mr. Welsh said. “I never thought I'd be able to get a home again, with credit checks and everything.”

A large, enthusiastic group of local civic and business leaders, community activists and local and state elected officials came to the PIP shelter to applaud the Home Again program.

“This new grant will enable Home Again to serve an additional 20 to 25 chronically homeless individuals with case management and permanent housing in and near Worcester,” said Deborah Ekstrom, president and CEO of Community Healthlink. There are 27 individuals in the program, along with Mr. Welch and Mr. Schneider.

U.S. Rep. James P. McGovern, D-Worcester, said he was proud of Worcester for spearheading the Home Again initiative, and for the program's extraordinary early successes.

Lt. Gov. Timothy P. Murray, chairman of the governor's Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness, said Worcester is the template for best practice throughout the state. Mr. Murray called City Manager Michael V. O'Brien the “driving force behind the regional network” and a champion of the Home Again program.

“And they said it would never happen,” Mr. O'Brien said. “Amazing. The Home Again program is one giant step forward to end homelessness in a compassionate way.”

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