

The Republican.

Springfield on road to end homelessness

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After 17 years of not knowing where he'd find a bed for the night, David Dixon finally has a place to call his own. Until recently, he was one of as many as 241 homeless individuals in Springfield who, on any given night, can be found sleeping under bridges, in doorways or crammed in group shelters.

Dixon now lives in a subsidized apartment on Berkshire Avenue, joining 35 in the first wave of homeless individuals who are now settled in their housing units under the city's "Homes Within Reach" program, a 10-year initiative to end homelessness.

The city and the Springfield Housing Authority are combining to provide up to 143 subsidized apartments this year for the chronically homeless. Under the program, homeless individuals and families will receive housing vouchers and help from an outreach worker who will help them adjust to the responsibilities they'll have as tenants." It's a great relief," Dixon said.

Businesses are helping too. Last week, under an effort led by Ron S. Sadowsky, vice president of Williams Distributing Corp. of Chicopee, volunteers began delivering the furniture to a warehouse on West Columbus Avenue until the items can be distributed to the apartments.

The new "Housing First" approach to homelessness is one that is expected to lower the financial burden society now shoulders to provide shelter and emergency room care for these most desperate citizens.

The old status quo of sheltering homeless people overnight and letting them fend for themselves during the day hasn't worked in America. What has worked is more permanent supportive housing units - and a place where homeless residents can go to receive health care, medications, alcohol- and substance-abuse counseling, job training and referral services, advocates for the homeless say.

We commend the city's effort, led by Robert Schwarz, executive vice president of Peter Pan Bus Lines, and Geraldine McCafferty, deputy director of homeless and special needs housing, and we salute business leaders like Sadowsky for reaching out to make a positive difference in the community and for those who need a helping hand.

