



CITY MISSION SOCIETY OF BOSTON

EMERGENCY NEEDS NETWORK

Since its inception over 190 years ago, CMS has provided help to some of the area's most vulnerable individuals and families. These people are in crisis because of unexpected expenses, illness, unemployment, low income, or sudden emergencies. Some are elderly and/or disabled, and many are quite isolated, with no family in the area and no support system. They reflect the multi-cultural and multi-racial population of the Greater Boston community.

For the past several years, the greatest need has been around housing and homelessness prevention, including payments for rental assistance and utilities. Direct assistance is available through our Emergency Needs Network (ENN), formerly the Crisis Intervention Program. Now the program has a new name, a new focus and a new way of operating. While we will continue to provide direct assistance to metropolitan Boston's neediest people, our new network will also focus on providing urgent help to those in danger of becoming homeless. This new format will rely on a network of community-based agencies to strengthen and inform our referral process.

The purpose of the new Network is to go beyond giving out emergency funding on a first-come, first-served basis. The ENN's focus on preventing homelessness is based on two key elements: early intervention and flexible support.

The partner agencies in the ENN offer a diversity of services including health care, adult education, legal services and ex-offender programs. They are in a position to identify their clients who are in danger of homelessness early in the process. These clients can then be referred to CMS for financial assistance early in the crisis rather than when a family is in serious financial trouble. Further more, these agencies' connections to ENN clients provide opportunities for long-term follow-up and assessment. In this way ENN will leverage existing resources that can weave a web of support to help individuals move toward housing stability.

In addition to providing limited funding to resolve an immediate housing crisis, the program will continue to provide information, referral, advocacy and support to assist clients in identifying resources and services which will provide long-range assistance. ENN assists people with Food Stamp applications, informs them about Mass Health benefits, housing resources, SSI applications, fuel assistance, etc. ENN also directs clients to vocational counseling, job search programs, child-care and other resources which enhance their lives.

To learn more about this program please contact ENN Director, Alison Coleman-Hardy, LICSW, at 617-742-6830 x 205 or email her at acolemanhardy@cmsboston.org.

Prevention is indeed a successful strategy in the battle against homelessness, especially if funds are allowed to be disbursed with flexibility. For far less money than it would cost to house individuals and families in emergency shelters, present housing can be maintained. Without a doubt, preventing homelessness is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do."

Preventing Homelessness & Promoting Housing Stability
Boston Foundation, June 2007