



BY ROCKY CARIDI — THE WASHINGTON POST

Delphine Washington, beside a childhood picture, found her apartment through a program that provides permanent housing for the homeless.

## Giving More Than Temporary Shelter

*New Tack in Effort Against Homelessness Brings Long-Term Housing to Families*

By **MARLANA MINAYA**,  
Special to the *Washington Post*

Montgomery County is expanding its efforts to help the homeless, focusing on providing permanent housing instead of short-term stays in shelters.

With an \$800,000 grant over two years from the Freddie Mac Foundation, the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless, a nonprofit that oversees many of the county's homeless programs, will be able to put more families into

apartments and other permanent housing.

And if a recent proposal is approved by the County Council, about \$4 million from the county's Housing Initiative Fund will go to affordable housing, rental assistance and support services for the homeless. The council's Planning, Housing and Economic Development Committee is scheduled to begin examining the proposal today.

"Nationally, there is this new approach called Housing First," which the county is following, said council member George L. Leventhal (D-

At Large), who announced the proposal last month with council President Michael Knapp (D-Upcounty). "The emphasis is whatever caused a person's homelessness — bad luck, mental illness, lack of skills — you can't begin to get a handle on the issue unless you have a permanent place to stay."

They propose devoting about 10 percent of the Housing Initiative Fund, which is paid for largely through a portion of property tax reve-

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## Coalition Seeks Permanent Solution to Homelessness

nues and typically finances affordable housing projects, to the "very poorest," Leventhal said.

As of Jan. 25, according to the most recent data, 1,139 people in the county lived in emergency shelters, transitional shelters or on the streets. Some 576 people lived in permanent supportive housing.

With its grant, the coalition will be able to provide housing for an additional 12 families, increasing their total to 95 families, plus 42 individuals. Another eight homeless people will be housed at the newly opened Dale Drive apartments in Silver Spring, a vacant building renovated with public and private donations.

The push to help families find homes has resulted in an apartment in Germantown for Kim Schaper and her fiance, Mike McDaniel, and a Gaithersburg apartment for Delphine Washington and her daughter. Schaper's three-bedroom home in Germantown has a fireplace, a patio and "enormous rooms" that are "just gorgeous" after months of living in motels, Schaper said.

Both families participate in the coalition's Partnership for Permanent Housing program, which finds homes for residents who pay 30 percent of their income for rent.

"It is a radical shift in how we were approaching the issue of homelessness," said Sarah Mahin, the coalition's spokeswoman. "At the core of someone's homelessness is the lack of housing, so you provide them with a permanent home and the services they need."

Washington, 49, a medical records coordinator at a doctor's office, became homeless in May 2005 and spent time in hotels, a shelter and, for about two years, transitional housing until she was admitted to the permanent housing program and then transferred to an apartment in Gaithersburg.

"All I wanted the government to do was give me a helping hand and put a roof over my child's head," she said. Now, "we have a very nice apartment. Me and my daughter are both happy."

Schaper, 26, said her family was unexpectedly evicted last year. Then the car broke down, and, unable to



PHOTO BY BRYAN GARDNER FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Delphine Washington turns on television in her Gaithersburg apartment. She spent two years in transitional housing before getting the apartment.

get to work, Schaper lost her secretary job.

"I was like, 'Oh, this isn't happening to me,'" said Schaper, who found out she was pregnant with the couple's third child two months before being evicted. "We've always had good places, we've always worked. . . . It was one hit after another."

Schaper said they were refused aid until they became homeless. Eventually they were put in the care of the coalition's senior case manager, Chandra Harris.

Harris, who visits 18 families and six individuals up to four times a month, depending on their needs, connects her clients with county services and other assistance. She helped Schaper and McDaniel find physical therapy for their premature son, and when Schaper left Christ-

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— DELPHINE WASHINGTON, Gaithersburg resident

mas toys on a bus, Harris gave her Target gift cards to replace them.

McDaniel, 24, is studying to become an electrician while balancing his job at a truck accessories company. Schaper, a nurse's assistant in Missouri before they moved to the Washington region, can finally try to obtain her Maryland license.

"We are doing so much better compared to where we were," she said. "We talk about how far we've gotten." They hope to be able to eventually afford their own home.

Ending homelessness was the county's goal in 2002 when officials announced an ambitious plan to build about 800 studio apartments by 2012. So far, only 48 have been created at the Seneca Heights Apartments in Gaithersburg and the rehabilitated Dale Drive apartments. A subsidiary of the coalition has acquired 36 moderately priced dwelling units to house the homeless.

"Obviously, we're way behind," Leventhal said. "I still want to see us



accomplish something significant by 2012. We're more than halfway [to the deadline], and we haven't done enough."

The goal of constructing enough new homes to end homelessness might have been a bit short-sighted, Leventhal said. The aim is not to create "little cities of homeless people," but rather to find existing housing and to provide assertive case managers to give intensive care or even seek out homeless people on the street.

The proposed county funds

would go a long way, said Sharan London, executive director of the coalition. "If we have that menu of services and subsidies, then we can provide better services to more people," she said.

Now the question before the council is "Can we make this work?" Leventhal said. "Is it the county's obligation to provide permanent, long-term subsidies to poor people?" he said. "I believe yes, because the alternative is unacceptable for us. We don't want people living on the street for many reasons."