

The METROWEST DAILY NEWS

SMOC seeks more money to aid homeless



SMOC's James T. Cuddy, executive director, left, and Jerry Desilets, Director of Policy, Planning and Community Relations Daily News Staff Photo / Allan Jung

By Danielle Ameden
Daily News Staff
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FRAMINGHAM - The South Middlesex Opportunity Council has joined other social service agencies all over the state to lobby for more state money to fight homelessness.

SMOC's Executive Director Jim Cuddy and his policy director Jerry Desilets, meeting with Daily News editors Wednesday, said the boost in funding would help their nonprofit meet the challenges it faces getting people off the streets in MetroWest.

Among the issues, SMOC is seeing a surge of 18- to 24-year-olds who need a place to stay, Cuddy said.

These young adults may have aged out of the Department of Children and Families system, he said. They don't have work experience or money for housing. They might have even "done something stupid" and ended up in the county jail — "Think of the kid who quit school and started couch-surfing after an argument with family," Cuddy said.

"The real fear, of course," he said, "is that they're going to become the next chronically homeless population."

SMOC also sees a need to provide for more housing and support for women who are active drug or alcohol users and likely may be dealing with trauma from relationships.

"That's where we're short" on space, Cuddy said.

The Coalition for Homeless Individuals, a collaboration among shelters and service providers of which SMOC is a member, is asking state lawmakers for \$48.5 million in the fiscal '15 state budget to benefit homeless individuals in Massachusetts.

It's a nearly \$8 million increase over Gov. Deval Patrick's \$40.7 million recommendation. The request addresses the fact funding for that line item, according to the coalition, has decreased by 14 percent since fiscal 2001 when adjusted for inflation.

SMOC runs homeless shelters in Framingham, Ashland and Marlborough that together house up to 50 people, and has other programs outside MetroWest, Desilets said.

The umbrella agency provides other services ranging from home heating assistance to behavioral health services to workforce development.

Any extra money for SMOC to help homeless individuals, Cuddy said, would go toward meeting unfunded needs first, and then help the agency look at giving work to support people going through the system.

Cuddy said there are now various economic and community factors behind homelessness.

His agency pushes sobriety and sufficiency as it takes in people who need a roof over their head. "We're trying to move people through all the time," he said.

He praised the Framingham Police Department, and said his agency has enjoyed a strong partnership with the force since settling a civil rights lawsuit against the town in 2010.

To give homeless people who hang out downtown a place to go, SMOC has set up a drop-in day center at the Salvation Army's former thrift store space on Concord Street. SMOC has "engagement people" there, attempting to intervene and offer services, Cuddy said.

Danielle Ameden can be reached at 508-626-4416 or dameden@wickedlocal.com. Follow her on Twitter @damedenMW