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HUD Grants Target Homeless Families

Rent Vouchers Aim To Help Households In Desperate Straits

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NEW BRITAIN —

The city expects to provide housing for 50 struggling, poor families in the next year through a new federal grant, Mayor Timothy Stewart said Monday.

The city is getting \$369,000 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to keep families from breaking up because of homelessness.

The money will provide Section 8 housing vouchers for eligible low-income families.

"This is good stuff for New Britain," Stewart said. "We've been working for a lot of years to end homelessness, and I think we're one of the few communities that's still continuing the effort."

The grant will help finance housing for up to 50 families for a full year. Hartford, the only other Connecticut city to land Family Unification Grant funding from HUD, will get enough to pay for 100 families. Gov. M. Jodi Rell said the collaboration between city, state and federal agencies will help struggling families during the economic downturn.

"This is exactly the way governments should be coordinating efforts on behalf of families who are doing their best in difficult circumstances to provide for their children," Rell said in a statement.

The state Department of Children and Families will give New Britain a list of 50 local families at risk of losing their children to foster care because they're homeless or at severe risk of becoming homeless. The city will then provide them with the housing assistance vouchers. Those vouchers cover most of the cost of an apartment for a year.

Families living in shelters or facing eviction make up the most common examples of those eligible for the assistance, said Lisa Royce, executive director of the housing authority. Section 8 is already providing housing for more than 750 people in New Britain, she said.

DCF will provide parenting instruction, employment training and other support to the families selected for the HUD vouchers, Royce said.

Susan Hamilton, the head of DCF, said the Family Unification Program is designed to help keep children together with their parents whenever safely possible.

"These vouchers come at a vital time when we are working with homeless families to get their lives back on track," Stewart said.

Royce said families should begin getting the vouchers in September or October. The grant carries no additional money for administrative expenses, but Royce said the city was eager to get the assistance anyway.

"All of the money goes to rent for the families," she said. "It's going to help New Britain people."