

# Dorchester Reporter

"The News and Values Around the Neighborhood"

## Families find haven, fresh start at Brookview

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Children work with site coordinator Daniel Depina at the Brookview House after-school program last Thursday. Pictured left to right are: Maryah Williams, Emmanuella Saturne, Isabella Saturne, Depina, and Jared Smith.

*Photo by Bijoyeta Das*

**By Bijoyeta Das**

**Special to the Reporter**

She said she always dreamt about dying from the time she was 4. Molested and homeless, Tammy, a mother of two, said she never found a reason to live until she came to Brookview House, a homeless shelter based near Dorchester's Franklin Field. After a year of living here, she is going to school and wants to write a book. Tammy is among many homeless women in Massachusetts, who have found not only an apartment through Brookview but also a chance to rebuild dreams.

Since 1990, Brookview House, Inc., a non-profit organization, has been providing assistance to homeless families with referrals from the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance. Currently, 30 families are provided housing in sites located at Brookview Street and Moreland Street and six scattered sites in Dorchester and Mattapan.

"I was molested by my father when I was 4, raped by someone I did not know, dealt with drug issues, battled an eating disorder and depression," Tammy, 28, said. It is because of her children she sought assistance from the state.

"When I first came, I was really scared to live in Dorchester. I thought I would always remain inside the house," she said. But Brookview got her enrolled at Dudley Street's Project Hope, which offers basic adult education to get her GED, got her daughter admitted to Boston public school and provided the best day care for her son, she said. "They connected me to the right people."

Brookview House provides rental and transitional housing through a "closed contract" with the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance. Homeless women and children are provided direct counseling, help with improving credit reports, after school program for the children, health, education and career related workshops.

"We could have had a building with just beds like Pine Street. But our approach is that, like any community member, people need time during transition," said Mercedes Tompkins, chief development officer at Brookview House.

"This is not a hotel room. It is an apartment where you can cook your meals and have a regular family life, then you can focus on the real issues of why you are homeless," Tompkins said.

How they feed themselves is their own issue, she said. "They are on their own, but they are really not on their own."

Families have lived at Brookview for a minimum of two weeks to a maximum of three years. There are many who come to shelters to get subsidized housing or earn less to qualify for healthcare.

"This is what I call perverse incentives," Tompkins said. "They appear lazy or are escaping, but these are the people who we focus on and help. They can take as long as they need to put certain elements of their lives together and then they can go out, so that they don't come back."

Brookview collaborates with shelters such as Pine Street Inn, Rosie's Place, Millennium House—a substance abuse program, and Project Hope. Interns from Lesley College and Suffolk University provide one-to-one counseling for the children and women.

"The rents are ridiculous. I tried to get apartments, it would either get raised or I couldn't pay," says India Smith, 38, who is living at Brookview with her son. "I expected the housing search but not everything else that came with it."

Brookview helped her find what she wanted to do with her life, she said.

Smith, who has been homeless for the last 15 years, is waiting to be united with her daughter who is with the Department of Social Services. She wants to go to college and work in the real estate business. "I love numbers and I also want to buy houses and help shelter homes get them."

After her divorce, Angela Veale found herself and her five children in a hotel room. "This was a new scary experience, my baby was one month old and we had to eat fast food everyday."

Having her own apartment with a stove was a lifesaver, she said. She did her internship as a receptionist at Brookview and was later hired as an administrative assistant.

"It was like a full circle. The whole year had gone by and I was back where I started, just on the other side now, and I could help women who needed assistance," she added.

Their two youth centers cater to the children of residents and are open to the community.

"For most of the kids it is their first time in a structured environment," says Daniel Depina, the youth site coordinator at Brookview House. Along with help with homework, classes on behavior management policies, self-esteem, respect, and hygiene are offered. The 9-week long summer program includes field trips to museums, beaches, hiking, and life skills workshops. "To let them experience things they missed out on," he added.

Entering the youth center at Brookview Street, Cianna Pinto, 7, signs in and begins writing in a journal.

"I write about the games I played," she said. "I write anything that is good, and everything is supposed to be good in the entire world."