

## **Gates Foundation housing funds help former addict rebuild her life**

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Daily Herald

09.18.07

If Bill and Melinda Gates ever wonder about the impact their foundation's \$9.47 million has made in the lives of homeless families in Snohomish County, they might want to listen to Kristy Geyer's story.

Her drug problems, which she said started at age 15, ended with addiction to methamphetamine. Eventually, she lost both her house and custody of her daughter, she said.

She spent six months at Evergreen Manor, an Everett inpatient drug treatment facility.

After completing the program in April 2006, she went to Pathways for Women, a program of the YWCA.

There, she said she found counseling, classes and "every resource you can possibly think of" to help her. Perhaps most importantly, this included a place to call home, a voucher to live at Family Tree Apartments in Everett.

From then on, a steadiness entered her life. She said she has been drug-free for two years. She regained custody of her daughter, Summer Hebener, who will turn 3 in December.

Geyer, 28, has enrolled at Edmonds Community College, earning a 3.7 grade point average last quarter. Her career goal is to become a pharmacy technician.

"Everything changes — your whole life changes — when you find help," she said. "I've got a place to live, my daughter is back in my life, and I'm making a career and future for myself. I really hope other people can find the same thing."

Geyer is one of the thousands of individuals who have been helped since the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched the \$40 million Sound Families Initiative in 2000. The goal was to provide both housing and help to people who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in Snohomish, King and Pierce counties.

Since then, a total of 1,455 new housing units have been created, serving more than 2,700 children and 1,500 families.

In Snohomish County, nine organizations have received a total of \$9.47 million for these projects, creating 370 housing units. Of those, 158 will open between now and 2010, said Alice Shobe, director of Sound Families.

Housing Hope, which received \$2.8 million, is the single biggest recipient of Sound Families money in the county.

"It's the most significant catalyst for change we've seen in a long time," said Ed Peterson, executive director.

The money pledged by the Gates Foundation has sparked other efforts, including a commitment of money from state government, he said.

"They have kind of a bully pulpit," Peterson added. "They can speak with a voice of authority and significant dollars that catch people's attention."

However, the recently announced grants are the last scheduled round of funding for the Sound Families program, raising questions over its future.

The foundation is still considering what might come next, said Katie Hong, an interim director of the Gates Foundation's Pacific Northwest programs. "We will know better by the end of the year what we might do."

While proud of the momentum and awareness of family homelessness the projects have created, "we're also aware that there's still so much more that needs to be done," she added.

This year, the Gates Foundation will send \$1.73 million to Snohomish County, enough to provide services and 62 housing units for the homeless.

Intercommunity Mercy Housing will receive \$410,000 to create 14 housing units and support services at Cedarwood 4 Apartments in Lake Stevens.

The 38-unit apartment building has been rehabilitated over the past several years, said Paul Chiocco, Mercy Housing's vice president of operations. The money from Sound Families will continue these efforts and provide intensive case management services for families, he said.

YWCA of Snohomish County will receive \$1.3 million for 48 housing units and support services at Victorian Woods in Mountlake Terrace and Somerset Village in Lynnwood.