

**Gateses give \$4.5 million to house at-risk families  
11 agencies will create 180 new housing units**

Aubrey Cohen  
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Two years ago, Kristina Geyer was addicted to methamphetamine and had just had her baby daughter taken away from her.

"I started using meth when I was about 14 years old, and I did it constantly," Geyer, 28, said Thursday.

These days, she is sober, living with her daughter and earning a 4.0 grade-point average at Edmonds Community College, where she is studying to become a pharmacy technician. She credits her turnaround largely to two programs that combine housing with social services such as case management and parenting classes.

Stories like Geyer's are why the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has pumped \$38.6 million into such housing programs since 2000 -- including \$4.5 million in grants that the foundation announced Thursday.

The new, final round of funding will help 11 agencies create 180 new housing units in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties, bringing the total for the foundation's Sound Families initiative to 1,445 -- just shy of its goal of 1,500 units that come with social services. Sound Families has served more than 2,700 children and 1,500 families, according to the foundation.

While the Gates Foundation funds programs around the world, Sound Families is a way to look "in our own backyard," said Katie Hong, co-chairwoman of Sound Families and interim director of Pacific Northwest giving for the foundation. Housing is one of the best ways to address inequities in the region and ensure that other social programs work, she said.

Up to 26,500 Washingtonians are without a home or safe place to sleep on any given night, according to recent estimates. Families with children are the fastest-growing segment of the homeless population nationwide and make up nearly half of all people staying in King County homeless shelters.

Most families find and keep permanent housing and have greater stability after leaving Sound Families programs, according to initial data collected by the University of Washington School of Social Work.

After an average stay of 13 months in a program, two-thirds of the families moved into permanent housing. As they left the program, employment rates

increased from 27 percent to 49 percent, and family incomes improved by more than \$1 an hour.

Sound Families will release a final, comprehensive evaluation report at the end of 2007.

Sound Families has helped to significantly expand housing and services for homeless families, said Sue Sherbrooke, chief executive of the YWCA of Seattle-King County-Snohomish County, which has won more than \$2.3 million from the initiative.

"I think its fair to say Sound Families shaped the nature of transitional housing for homeless families in the region," Sherbrooke said. She termed as "hugely creative" the foundation's understanding of the need to match housing and services and its willingness to give long-term funding for services.

The breakdown of the funding announced Thursday is \$1.7 million for 74 units in King County, \$1.1 million for 44 units in Pierce County and \$1.7 million 62 units in Snohomish County. Hong said foundation officials would consider future grants to help keep programs working well and are exploring options for new initiatives to help make a dent in family homelessness.

While Sound Families has helped individual families, she said: "As a community we can't say that we've actually reduced the number of homeless families. That's something that we're really interested in looking at."

As for Geyer, she expects to finish school, get a job and move into regular housing next spring. Asked where she'd be without the programs that helped her, she said: "I'm pretty sure that I'd still be out there using and probably just living from place to place."