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Gates Foundation gives \$4.5M to aid homeless families

By Cara Solomon

Seattle Times South King County reporter

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation on Thursday announced more than \$4.5 million in new grants to provide housing and services for families who are homeless, or are at risk for becoming homeless, in King, Pierce and Snohomish counties.

The grants will help create 180 mostly transitional housing units, with life-skills classes, counseling and jobs training for the people who live there. This is the final round of grants in the Gates Foundation's seven-year, \$40 million Sound Families Initiative, which prepares families for permanent housing and self-sufficiency.

With the latest grant round, Sound Families has now funded 1,445 new units and served more than 2,700 children and 1,500 families in the three-county region. But recent estimates by government agencies and service providers suggest there are up to 26,5000 people in the state who do not have a home, or a safe place to sleep.

"Unfortunately, the affordable-housing crisis is getting worse, not better," said Katie Hong, interim director for the Pacific Northwest initiative at the Gates Foundation. Early research from the University of Washington shows Sound Families is making a dent in the problem. About two-thirds of families have found permanent housing, and significantly more adults were employed. "That's a key thing we feel really good about," said Hong. "Not just the impact to the parents ... but the security and stability that their children feel."

In this grant round, \$1.7 million (74 units) was awarded to a range of King County agencies, from Family Services of King County to Muslim Housing Services. In Pierce County, \$1.1 million (44 units) went to Helping Hand House, Multi-Service Center and the Tacoma Rescue Mission. And in Snohomish County, \$1.7 million (62 units) was awarded to Intercommunity Mercy Housing and the YWCA of Seattle-King County-Snohomish County.

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