

New program in Belfast is helping homeless families find housing

By Kathleen O'Brien **September 30, 2026**

A nonprofit in Belfast has stepped up to help local homeless families by providing free volunteer-run housing and financial guidance in a region that previously lacked such resources.

The Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition launched a transitional housing program this year called Family Harbor House in the lower level of the Belfast United Methodist Church, which once held a daycare program.

The 2,500-square-footspace has four bedrooms, two full bathrooms and common areas that hold a kitchen, laundry and recreation space. Three or four families can live there at no cost, and the nonprofit assists with other needs including food and transportation to appointments, if needed, said David Beseda, director of Family Harbor House.

More than 100 trained volunteers staff the transitional housing 24 hours a day and donations cover the resource's operating costs, which amount to roughly \$180,000 annually, according to Beseda.

The successful model is a small-scale example of what's possible when community members join forces to address homelessness, which is one of the state's most pervasive challenges. While picturesque coastal communities like Belfast don't have hundreds of people grappling with homelessness, the region's high housing prices and exceptionally tight availability act as barriers for low-income families struggling to get ahead.



Mary Sullivan, secretary of the board of directors of the Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition, puts finishing touches on a housing unit wall in the final stages of preparing Family Harbor House for use.

COURTESY OF MIDCOAST MAINE HOMELESS COALITION

Belfast

“There’s no other homeless shelter or transitional housing in the state that’s entirely volunteer-run,” Beseda said. “That’s pretty stunning and says a lot of the people in this community.”

The 2025 Point In Time Count, which documents every person experiencing homelessness in Maine on one night every year, found 122 total people in Waldo, Knox, Lincoln and Sagadahoc counties and Brunswick and Harpswell were without permanent housing. That’s a small percentage of the more than 2,400 people experiencing homelessness in Maine that year.

Most people struggling with homelessness in Belfast aren’t living outside. Instead, they’re couch-surfing, living in hotels, doubled up with others or in trailers, Beseda said.

Family Harbor House doesn’t function like an emergency shelter where people move in and out each day. Instead, families are interviewed before moving in for an extended time, where they can access support services such as budgeting assistance so they can save for permanent housing, said Steve Alspach, a Midcoast Maine Homeless Coalition board member.

“The idea is to give people a break from all their money going into last resort housing like hotel rooms,” Beseda said.

The program is hosting four families with 15 total people and is at capacity, according to Alspach.

Regardless, Beseda said he receives multiple calls each week from people or case workers looking for help, as there’s no other transitional housing or emergency shelter in the area.

“There’s no other place that homeless families can go in the county, so they’d have to go to Rockland, Rockport or Bangor, but their lives are here, their children are in school here and their jobs are here,” Beseda said.

Though Family Harbor House has only been in operation for nine months, Beseda said the nonprofit is already planning to expand the program to house more families.

The organization’s first family — a mother with young children — found permanent housing this past summer when she was able to buy a nearby mobile home, ending a six-month stay in Family Harbor House, according to Beseda.

The family had been staying in a hotel room after the trailer they were living in deteriorated to the point of being uninhabitable and the city’s code enforcement department

condemned it. The mother moved into a hotel room, but wasn't able to save any money to advance, as every paycheck went to housing costs.

Watching the organization's first family successfully advance out of the program and into their own home was "thrilling," Beseda said, as it showed what's possible for others.

"There's a lot working against folks to get their own place and get out of such tenuous situations," Beseda said. "It proves that with support, help and time, people can find those few accessible channels to find something they can afford that's stable."