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Tuesday 19 April, 2005

Home > News > News > New Britain

News

New Britain

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Business

Obituaries

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Weather

Hot Shots

Sports

Classifieds

Photo Galleries

Entertainment

Features

Purchase Printing Plates

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Fun and Games

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New Britain

Grant to help get medical care to the homeless

By PENNY RIORDAN, Staff Writer

04/19/2005

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NEW BRITAIN -- The Community Health Center Inc. has received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health for a new program to improve immediate and preventive medical services to the homeless.

The program, called Wherever You Are, will allow center physicians, nurses and social workers to meet with patients at access points, or neighborhood locations where those who are lower-income or homeless are more likely to be found.

"The needs of the homeless in the area of health care are quite significant, and this will go a long way to help us to reach that population and ease their plight," said Mark Masselli, CEO of the center.

The organization received \$739,000 to be divided among three communities: New Britain, Middletown and Meriden.

Two locations in New Britain, the Salvation Army Shelter and the Prudence Crandall Domestic Violence Shelter, will serve as access points, or host locations, for center employees when they meet with patients.

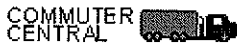
The program is an outgrowth of a collaborative planning effort between the center and other organizations serving the homeless, who are less likely to seek medical treatment or more likely to go untreated, according to a release.

Dental care is essentially out of reach for the homeless, Masselli said. Substance abuse and mental health treatment is available, but the homeless face great obstacles such as long waiting lists and eligibility criteria.

The program is designed to eliminate many of the barriers, to reduce health disparities and reverse the shortened life span that has been documented for the homeless, Masselli said.

The grant was made possible in part by the efforts of U.S. Rep. Nancy Johnson, R-

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5th District, who worked to help the center receive the grant, Masselli said.

"This is a victory for more affordable health care in New Britain and Meriden," Johnson said. "The centers in Meriden and New Britain will provide comprehensive health care services to underserved residents, regardless of ability to pay. This new funding will allow the center and its committed staff to increase services to those who may otherwise go without necessary health care."

Center officials estimate 1,500 people will benefit from the program, which is expected to start in December.

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