



No place like home for Roxbury family

By Marie Szanislo
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A Roxbury boy who lived out of a shelter with his mother and 3-year-old sister until last month bounded off the school bus yesterday . . . to the first home they have had in nearly a year.

The 12-year-old arrived at their Roxbury walk-up to find his mother outside waiting for him, a grin on her face.

"I used to hesitate to say where I lived," he said. "Now I can even have friends over."

Only 18 months ago, his mother had been laid off from her customer-service job at a local insurance agency. By last October, she could no longer afford to pay their \$1,400 rent, and the family was evicted from its Dorchester apartment. The Herald is withholding the family members' names.

"The lowest point was when we were leaving and my son said, 'Where are we going to go?' " she said, beginning to cry. "I said to myself: If I have to lie to him, I'll lie to him. But we will find a way."

After bouncing from one relative's home to another, the state Department of Transitional Assistance moved them to a Braintree hotel.

"We could only take four bags," she said.

They lived there for the next five months, until a space became available at Project Hope, a Dorchester shelter the Little Sisters of the Assumption opened in 1981 out of a Victorian home on Magnolia Street.

"I will never forget: The van pulled up, we got out, and the director and case manager hugged us," the mom said. "They will forever be a part of my life. They pushed me to be the best I can be."

She spent the next few months taking part in every program the shelter offered, and on Aug. 15, she and her two children moved into a three-bedroom apartment subsidized by a combination of public and private funds.

They were one of more than 700 families brought back from the brink of life on the street this year by federal stimulus dollars Boston has targeted at preventing homelessness, said Sister Margaret Leonard, Project Hope's executive director.

"It's really tough being in a shelter, especially if you're a child," Leonard said. "It also costs about \$35,000 a year. So it's much more cost-effective to prevent someone from becoming homeless."

Today, the mom divides her days between a job-training program and classes to brush up on her business writing skills. Her son gets up at dawn now, no longer the sleepy-eyed boy who'd been reluctant to head to school. And although the only furnishings in his room are a bed and a chest of drawers topped by a mirror and a glow-in-the-dark Harley Davidson clock the shelter gave him, they are his.

"He used to look worried, more intense," his mother said. "Now, he seems excited, more relaxed. He finally got back what he once had."



Photo by Christopher Evans

AT LAST: After being homeless for months, a mother cooks as her son looks on in their new Roxbury home yesterday.