

Bangor hasn't had a family shelter in more than a decade. This organization wants to open one



Alex Acquisto | BDN

Donald Lynch, assistant director of Families and Children Together, wants to turn the house behind him into a two-family emergency shelter.

By [Alex Acquisto](#), BDN Staff • August 16, 2018 1:00 am

With few local housing options for families suffering from homelessness, a local social services organization hopes to open a two-family emergency shelter in the city, and is seeking a zone change to do so.

Families and Children Together on Hancock Street is seeking a zone change to operate the family emergency shelter in a single-family home at 114 Somerset St., which the organization has owned for the past four years. It's not yet a done deal, but employees are determined, Assistant Director Donald Lynch said. If city officials don't approve the proposal, the organization will try elsewhere in Bangor.

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“Our goal is to keep families together until we can get them the resources they need and find permanent housing,” Lynch said.

The organization’s ultimate goal is to lift families out of homelessness. “This seemed like a natural course of action for what seems like a growing population in this region,” Communications Coordinator Derek Hurder said.

It’s often difficult to gauge how many individuals at any given time are struggling with homelessness, Lynch said, and Boyd Kronholm, executive director of the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter, agreed. Tracking homeless families, they said, is even harder.

“With family homelessness, it’s almost a hidden homelessness,” Lynch said. “People are very resourceful in helping keep their kids housed.” That often means moving between homes of family and friends, and sleeping in tents or vehicles. Since January, Families and Children Together has been contacted by nearly 50 families seeking resources, said Fran Walsh, a family services navigator.

When families do approach one of the city’s shelters, they’re invariably split between facilities, said Kronholm, who also serves on the board of directors for Families and Children Together. If there’s room, adults stay at the Bangor shelter or the Hope House, and youth can sleep at the Shaw House.

If a family wants to stay together, they’re referred to family shelters in Ellsworth, Waterville or Presque Isle. “Being homeless is disruptive enough,” Kronholm said, and having no choice but to relocate only exacerbates the hardship.

In a city where the struggle with homelessness is often on display, as was the case when police [cleared](#) one of the city’s [largest outdoor encampments](#) along the Penobscot River late last month, it’s contingent on the community to find a solution, Lynch said.

Whether resources are available for families “really says what kind of community we are,” Lynch said.

The exact cost of operating a two-family shelter isn't yet known, but the organization will lean on the community to help raise money, he said.

The Planning Board will vet the zone change proposal at its Tuesday meeting and give its recommendation to the City Council.