

Help for homeless coalition part of Blue Cross' celebration

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LYNN — Close to 50 employees of a Massachusetts health care company spent their Tuesday helping a state homeless coalition in Lynn organize and spruce up furniture for low-income families.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts celebrated its 75th anniversary Tuesday with statewide community service projects, including one in Lynn at the headquarters of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless.

Volunteers moved dozens of donated desks, sanded and painted headboards and footboards for twin beds and cleared the shelves at the coalition's warehouse of furniture past its time.

[View a photo gallery. \(http://itemlive.mycapture.com/mycapture/folder.asp?event=1539617&CategoryID=71214\)](http://itemlive.mycapture.com/mycapture/folder.asp?event=1539617&CategoryID=71214)

"We're all fortunate. We have great jobs, we have a paycheck, and there are people that are less fortunate," said Barbara Clark, a Blue Cross Blue Shield employee from Lynn, about why she volunteered.

Tuesday's effort multiplied the employee base at the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless by 10 and provided some much needed help, said Lois Ferraresso, the associate director of the coalition.

The coalition owns a large warehouse in Lynn that it stocks with donated furniture from area colleges, businesses and residents. It gives away the furniture to low-income people across the state, with a focus on the North Shore. But with a staff of five, Ferraresso said tasks like sprucing up the furniture often get cut from the to-do list.

She said repaired furniture is more likely to get chosen by people or families who come to the warehouse.

"The minute it gets painted, it goes out the door," she said.

The coalition, which runs a homeless prevention program in the Lynn Community Health Care Center and school system, started a project last year to buy new twin beds for children in Lynn after realizing many low-income children fall asleep in class because they don't have beds at home.

Tuesday's volunteers painted and sanded headboards and footboards for the twin beds, which the coalition buys new. Ferraresso said they will expand the initiative to schoolchildren in Worcester and Boston this year.

"It makes it so it's very fresh and attractive to put in someone's room," she said.

Danielle Lozzi of Lawrence, originally from Revere, said she was happy to contribute to such a project.

"If the kids are not going to be rested enough to get an education, it's just going to be a vicious cycle, and we want that cycle to come to an end," she said.

For more information about the coalition, visit www.mahomeless.org (<http://www.mahomeless.org>) or call 781-595-7570.

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