

By [Mike Lamb](#)

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Programs provide Barstow family with housing option

BARSTOW — Five years ago, homelessness was not even on Jill Brown's mind.

But last November the single mother of three hit "rock bottom" — for the second time.

"I never dreamed. It never crossed my mind," Brown said of being homeless. She sat in a meeting room inside Desert Manna in Barstow. The shelter on Second Avenue has been home for her family since November. It's the family's second time living in a shelter. The first time was in Victorville.

"Things just fell apart slowly," she said. "And there was no control. I had no control."

Brown and her three children sat around a large conference table inside the Desert Manna shelter to share their story. Daughters Jazlynn and Jazmyn attend Central High School and Jeremiah attends Henderson Elementary.

All three sat quietly at the table while their mother shared their struggles.

"We were evicted last June," she said. "Ever since then we've had a rough time. It's been a really tough time. It's been bad for us. We ended up in a couple motels that were dumps. That was the best I could do. I was only getting \$331 a month in cash aid."

Her father's death left Brown with some insurance money, but she said that quickly dried up. But she did get some help.

"You know, we had strangers that would help us. Who would pay up (rent for motel). Random strangers would help us. We've been blessed," she said.

The big break for Brown came when she walked inside Desert Manna. Not only did Desert Manna provide shelter for the family, but also hope for the future.

"I had nowhere to go. No family. We would have been on the streets. Literally on the streets. This place has really helped me a lot," Brown said.

Her daughter, Jazlynn, agrees.

"It's pretty good. We are in a better place now. It's a better environment. As long as we have everything we need. I have my family, so I'm good," she said.

Brown was put to work in the kitchen and the students enrolled in local schools and are doing well. Jazlynn hopes to become a veterinarian some day. Jazmyn recently was honored for a Black History project.

"At first, it was hard. Very hard. But you have to find your place. I found my place in the kitchen. So that helps. It's rewarding," Brown said. "It isn't that we are just here and woe's me. It could be that way, but we chose to do everything we can. I know there is something better."

Something better comes April 1. That's the date the family plans to move into their own housing with the help from a combination of local and county programs. The Inland Temporary Homes and KEYS (Knowledge and Education for Your Success, Inc.) programs are coordinating efforts through New Hope Village in Barstow to get people off the streets and into permanent housing.

The programs also will help Brown find employment.

Inland Temporary Homes is a county program that provides housing, case management and other supportive services to families who have no place to live. It uses a rapid re-housing model designed to help families to escape homelessness and return to permanent housing. The program offers housing navigation, security deposit, rental assistance, utility deposits, case management, mental health, life skills and follow-up services.

"We are thinking outside the box," Program Director Andy Helm said. It primarily provides services within 15 miles of Loma Linda, but now offers a limited amount of help in Barstow by partnering with the local nonprofit organization called New Hope Village. So far, Helm says six families have successfully found housing in Barstow through the partnership of Inland Temporary Homes and New Hope Village.

According to Helm, not all families qualify.

"We want to fund families until they are self-sufficient. That's part of the interview process. Does the family have no motivation to get a job? What kind of rental assistance do they need? If a family says two years (rental assistance), this is not the program for you."

At the same time, Helm said resources will be provided to the family so job searches can be done and to get children to school. Besides families, Helm said there is a county-wide push to get military veterans off the streets and into housing.

KEYS is a nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing services for economically disadvantaged individuals and families in San Bernardino County, including homeless, veterans and at-risk youth.

Program Manager Julie Burnette said KEYS acts as a bridge to permanent housing and usually gets referrals from the San Bernardino County Transitional



Jill Brown, right, pours cereal milk for her daughter Jazmyn, at Desert Manna's Shelter. The family has been there since November and is working toward a goal of moving out by April 1. James Quigg, Daily Press

Assistance Department. This office handles assistance through CalWorks, CalFresh, Child benefits, Welfare to Work and Medi-Cal.

Burnette also said there is a screening process for clients and working relationships are established with area landlords. She says KEYS has maintained a 90 percent success rate.

"We look at what they can afford. We don't want them to go homeless to homeless," Burnette said.

Since the beginning of the current fiscal year, Burnette said KEYS has established 330 households county wide and there are 45 active cases right now. She said about 20 percent of those cases are in Barstow.

New Hope Village in Barstow started its partnership with Inland Temporary Homes after losing a \$67,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"They (Inland Temporary Homes) will pay rental assistance and our two bedrooms are \$753, but they are fully furnished. Our one bedrooms are \$600. That's the lowest on the HUD scale," Angela Pasco said. She is the executive director of New Hope Village.

She said everything from sheets, towels and silverware are provided. The tenant pays 30 percent of their rent and Inland Temporary Homes picks up the rest.

"The collaboration really saved us. US Vets and KEYS is the same way," Pasco said. "It helps us spend their grant money. We are getting people off the street and out of shelters and getting them out of the homeless population. It's a win-win because when we lost our grant we needed something to supplement our funding loss."

Getting homeless into housing takes quite a bit of funding. Tired of seeing the homeless living along Main Street, City Councilman Richard Harpole proposed in December a one-quarter cent sales tax to fund homeless issues.

Harpole said that such a program could provide transitional housing, psychiatry, alcohol treatment, lifestyle training, employment counseling and develop a plan to move these people from homelessness to a sustainable lifestyle.

He said the money raised could support the salaries of two people working on the problem.

"We have to send people out to talk to them," Harpole said. "And you have to recognize, it's not going to be a one-time go see them. You are going to have to see them multiple times. You may go see them a dozen times before you can convince them to take part in a program."

On Friday, Harpole said the City Council will be holding a goal-setting session next month. He's hopeful that his homeless funding proposal will become one of the Council's goals. If not, he plans to spearhead a petition drive to get the tax on a ballot.

"I'm working on a solution that will involve local funding, local control to move people from homelessness to a sustainable life," he said.

That's exactly what Brown and her family say they are looking for in the future. She plans to continue to give back to Desert Manna and eventually look for work in either the food industry or medical field. She is already a certified nursing assistant and she hopes to go back to school and earn her licensed practical nurse and registered nurse certifications.

Before she became homeless, Brown said she never volunteered.

"I never knew it would be like this. Back then I never understood it. It took awhile, but I get it now. I will still volunteer," she said. "You do what have to do and do extra. Show that you are worth something. It's going to be fine."

Mike Lamb can be reached at 760-957-0613 or mlamb@desertdispatch.com. You can also follow him on Twitter @mlambdispatch.

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