

This is a printer friendly version of an article from the **Daily Record**  
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

---

10/7/07 - Posted from the Daily Record newsroom

## Their stories explain what shelter means to homeless

Out of the blue, I found myself this week touring the main shelter of Homeless Solutions Inc., which from the disaffected Morris County earth has carved out shelters, transitional residences and permanent housing for those down on their luck.

The shelter is up on a Hanover Avenue hill in Morris Township, part of a colony of Morris County buildings that include the police and fire academy, Morris View nursing home, the juvenile detention center and the shade tree commission.

It's not the perfect place for a shelter -- miles away from stores and transportation, jobs and schools -- but it is the perfect shelter.

First-floor doorways frame neatly made beds with shoes tucked underneath, freestanding wooden closets, a few televisions. Clean, warm and dry. Here, men get help finding and keeping jobs, recovering from addiction, scraping together savings.

Upstairs, evidence of children everywhere -- pink sneakers, hairbrushes, box games and elastics for pony tails. Here, families, children and single woman re-assemble their lives, which were pulled apart by divorce, domestic violence, inadequate childcare, nonliving wages.

The place is empty. Where is everyone?

"Most are at work," says executive director Elizabeth Hall, who oversees the Homeless Solutions network every day even as she imagines its future.

In Hall's future, the organization is self-sustaining and our neighborhoods are more willing to see residents of affordable housing as nothing more than neighbors with families, jobs and dreams of a better life. (After all, Morris County is so pricy that a family of four earning \$67,438 qualifies for affordable housing.)

In Hall's future, there are more shelter beds, more transitional residences and more affordable-housing units for clients to rent.

For now, Hall and the organization's board do it with relentless fundraising, grant-writing and lots of elbow grease.

In 2006, 196 children, men and women lived at the shelter during long and short stays. They kept it clean and attended ongoing and mandatory classes on skills they will need for the road ahead: budgeting, credit counseling, job-search skills, home hunting, parenting and maintaining a healthy self. Sounds like the self-help section at Borders or Barnes & Noble, doesn't it?

You wouldn't spot the place driving by. Still, more than 500 volunteers pour into the shelter every year, painting and cleaning, cooking and counseling.

Who lives here?

Listen and see if you know anyone in the same situation:

"I am not supposed to be homeless," the single mother says. "I come from a good family. Both my parents died and my husband's violence became too much. I didn't want my boys to see that kind of a life.

"What I have learned here is wonderful. I have learned how to talk to my children so we don't start yelling. I have a car and a driver's license for the first time. And I have a job ... ."

From a single father: "In the mid-1990s I was doing very well. I had a job as a machine operator and a one-bedroom apartment. In 1999 ... the company closed and moved out of state. After the birth of my son, we were evicted for having too many occupants.

"I am currently enrolled in a six-week tractor-trailer training school, and my son is doing very well in school. Homeless

Solutions helped us to secure our own two-bedroom apartment, and we are now living independently."

I drove off, challenging myself to come up with a cool, new way to tell the familiar and decidedly nonsexy story of Homeless Solutions. Now I realize it does not need my story-telling skills. Homeless Solutions does good work when no one is looking, and what could be cooler than that?

• • •

If you can make a gift of time, services or money, and want it used correctly, consider Homeless Solutions ([www.homelesssolutions.org](http://www.homelesssolutions.org)). They get it right.

---

Executive Editor James Flachsenhaar can be reached at [jflachse@gannett.com](mailto:jflachse@gannett.com) and (973) 428-6601. His column appears Sunday.

---