

NewLife Home Refurnishing is partnering with Friends of Boston's Homeless Housing Start-up Fund to provide quality furniture and household items for Housing First clients as they move into their own apartments, many for the first time in their lives. Here is founding Board Member Barbara Yates' account of the two most recent clients who moved into their new homes on Christmas Eve.

SMILES AND HUGS

By Barbara Yates

On December 23, 2013, NewLife Home Refurnishing served two HUES to Home Housing First clients. Theresa and Harold, both of who experienced chronic homelessness, came to our warehouse in Medfield with Cherline, their social worker. I was struck by the fact that both clients (no connection to each other) were old enough to have been Cherline's parents.

It may sound easy, but learning how to make this experience a dignified, comfortable and effective event is a delicate balance of being helpful and sensitive without overdoing it. It always feels awkward at the beginning, as clients look around the warehouse to identify what they will take, knowing that they only get one visit. For most, the choices appear to be overwhelming at first, even with our limited inventory. Then there is a breakthrough moment, usually after some conversation about "this vs. that", when things start to come together.

Since Harold had already moved into a studio apartment with some furnishings, his needs were more limited. When he spotted a padded rocker, he asked, "Can I sit in that?" I replied "Of course", and was rewarded with a big grin as he sat down and rocked. That rocking chair was clearly a keeper! Most of the other things he needed were smaller household items and linens. As his pile of acquisitions accumulated, he visibly relaxed and just kept looking over at the rocker and smiling at it and then at me.

As Theresa selected the furniture for her one bedroom apartment, she told me that she has twelve grandchildren! She clearly looked forward to being able to have them visit her in her new home. She seemed especially excited about the living room furniture, which would help her host her family in comfort.

By the time everything was packed safely on the truck, Theresa was so at ease that she gave me a big hug. That hug and Harold's smile stayed with me for days as a reminder that volunteers usually get more than they give.

*Note: Names of HUES to Home clients have been changed to protect their identity.