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Boston University
Boston, Mass.--A $30,000 grant recently awarded to the University Hospital (UH) by the Boston Foundation will help keep its Elders Living at Home (ELAH) program alive for another year. The existence of ELAH--which is designed to prevent Boston elders from becoming homeless--was threatened when its three-year funding as a demonstration program came to an end in November. The Boston Foundation grant is the largest single contribution to the program, which now must rely on multiple private donations to survive.

The UH ELAH program, which began in 1986 with three-year start-up funding from the Commonwealth Fund and a consortium of local funders--is one of only 20 such programs nationwide designed to help elders at risk of being homeless. All ELAH programs serve individuals with physical, emotional, social or family problems, who live in substandard housing, have been displaced from their homes, or have changing physical abilities requiring housing modifications or emergency medical attention. By providing home health care, homemaking services, advocacy, home repairs, and social service, ELAH programs attempt to keep the elderly living independently in their own homes as long as possible.

What distinguishes UH's program from others throughout the country is its temporary housing program, which offers the homeless elder a place to live until he or she finds a permanent living arrangement. In addition to a furnished studio apartment, the elder receives intensive assistance in developing independent living skills and in finding permanent housing.

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Because of increased demand for such services and the success of this program, ELAH expanded from eight apartments to 14 this summer; six apartments are at 80 West Dedham Street and eight at 1701 Washington Street in the South End.

According to Eileen O'Brien, program coordinator for UH's ELAH, there are about 600 elders in Boston without permanent housing, either because they are on the streets, being shuttled from one relative to another or because they are in temporary shelters. An equal number are at risk of losing their homes.

During the three years since its inception, more than 300 Boston elders have been kept from homelessness because of the help they received from Elders Living at Home. One example is 75-year-old Joe Smith who faced eviction from his apartment because deteriorating mental and physical health had left him unable to care for himself or his financial affairs. He had stopped paying his rent, and his apartment was filling up with garbage. At the suggestion of a social worker, Joe turned to ELAH staff who worked with him to find a solution to his problems.

First ELAH helped Joe get the medical care he needed and recommended homemaker services as a way for him to cope better with his household affairs. In addition, they sat down with Joe and his landlord to develop an acceptable rent payment process and schedule. Today, instead of living in the street, Joe still lives in the apartment he considers home and is feeling better than he has in years.

In addition to the University Hospital—which is the lead agency—many other organizations contribute services to ELAH, including Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly, Boston Aging Concerns, Hale-Barnard, Ecumenical Social Action Committee, Greater Boston Elderly Legal Services, and Senior Home Care.

Other donors funding the continuation of this program are the Bank of Boston, Clippership Foundation, Sailors Snug Harbor, the Hyams Foundation, the Boston Globe, Stop & Shop, Farnsworth Trust, the Bank of New England and the Ratshesky Foundation.

The University Hospital, founded in 1855, is a principal teaching hospital affiliated with Boston University School of Medicine and a member of Boston University Medical Center.

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