

Through my present job, as a case manager for people in supportive housing, I need to by supplies for the apartments that my company manages. Supportive housing is for individuals that are homeless and have some type of assessed disability. There are many such programs through out the country. Ours specializes in families. Most of the families come from domestic violence situations or situations where everything in the family was lost due to drug use.

When a family moves in they are supplied with everything that is needed to live comfortably in the apartment. The furniture, bedding, dishes and towels are provided. My director and I watch for clearance sales to pick up the items. We feel very strongly that the items need to be new. This helps the family feel that they are making a new and fresh start to their lives. I have found through buying all the merchandize that foam mattress pads are the best investment to make. We are not able to afford the highest quality of mattresses and box springs. The foam mattress pads add padding and softness. The added loft in the foam mattress pads also helps the sheets fit tighter on the mattress and keeps them from slipping. Because our families come from varied backgrounds and are so emotionally worn out from being homeless I help them move in. This also helps me to understand the family better by seeing what belongings they have. I also help them organize their belongings along with the new items that have been purchased for them.

I have found that with the older children in the families a good way to start a non- threatening relationship is to do some type of task with them. Many times these children do not know how to make a bed. I have them help put on the foam mattress pads and the sheets. We have many quilts that have been donated to our program from local churches. I let them choose which color and pattern of quilt they want. This is helping them feel that this is their home. Also if the child helps pick things out they take some ownership in the quilt and will tend to take better care of it. My role is to help families turn their lives around so that they become stable. Helping to teach the children responsibility is the best way to end homelessness for the next generation. If you are looking to grow as a person and to help others, reach out to a homeless person. You do not need to give money, but rather share the skills that you have learned to help them overcome poverty and despair.