

School Board OKs shelter for children

Tuesday

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One more vote from the County Council is the last piece needed to turn an old elementary school into a homeless shelter for kids and their parents.

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DELAND — A year from now, hundreds of homeless Volusia County kids who would otherwise be destined to sleep in musty motel rooms, abandoned buildings with no power or the woods will have a bed waiting for them in a newly remodeled complex of buildings.

School Board members voted unanimously Tuesday night to get into a contract with the county government that will lock in a deal to transform the mostly vacant Hurst Elementary School into a homeless shelter with space for 300 children and their parents.

"Stability is the best gift any parent can give to their children," Forough Hosseini, who many regard as the person who brought the project across the finish line, told school board members.

"This is the entire community coming together to do something to help homeless children," added Hosseini, who is the chairwoman of the Daytona State College Board of Trustees, a member of the United Way Foundation Board and executive vice president of information systems for ICI Homes.

Last year, the Volusia County school system identified more than 2,300 of its students as homeless.

About 20 local leaders were at the meeting to show their support, and several of them spoke in favor of the plan to help people climb out of homelessness.

Jayson Meyer, CEO of Synergy Billing, said his business is located near Hurst Elementary and he plans to help people who stay at the shelter with job training.

"This addresses a very critical need in our community," Meyer said.

School Board members said they're happy to help create a refuge for unsheltered kids in the unused, little red brick school buildings.

"It's a wonderful opportunity to be a participant in this historic opportunity," school board member Linda Cuthbert said. "I was very impressed with the county and their generosity."

About two weeks ago, the Volusia County Council agreed to provide more than \$1 million to set the children's shelter project in motion. And in coming weeks, council members are expected to approve giving another \$3.5 million to transform the old school into an assistance center that will provide families and teens on their own a temporary place to stay and an array of help to get back on their feet.

The 55,000-square-foot assistance center will be called Hope Place.