EXETER – Tanya Coburn, a single mother of three, found herself in the unenviable position of being homeless after going through a divorce, before finding herself in the arms of Seacoast Family Promise, where she was “dusted off” and helped along the path back to financial security.

“It really does make a difference in our lives, so thank you so much,” Coburn said last week at SFP’s 12th Anniversary Fundraiser, held at the Inn at Exeter, before tearfully embracing Executive Director Pati Frew-Waters.

The homeless day assistance center is currently located in the basement of the Stratham Community Church, a space which SFP has inarguably outgrown. Thursday night’s event looked to raise funds for the organization, which receives no federal money and operates on a mostly volunteer basis, helping families with children experiencing temporary homelessness.

Though the fate of SFP’s planned move to Hampton Road in Exeter is now in the hands of a Superior Court judge, the legal situation cast no pall over the crowded fundraiser. Those speaking made no direct reference to the case, in which a group of neighbors to the property in question are fighting to reverse a ZBA decision allowing SFP to move in, but those attending were unanimous in their optimism.

“We’re crossing our fingers,” said Pat Yosha, while Exeter resident and blogger Mike Lambert said, “I think the judge is going to do right by this organization and let them in.”

CEO of Catholic Charities of New Hampshire Tom Blonski addressed the crowd, beginning with a quote from the Book of Mark, asking, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

Seacoast Family Promise staff and volunteers, Blonski said, exude a “silent heroism” and truly live out their mission of helping the poor and vulnerable on the Seacoast.

Referring to his own experiences over the years helping those in poverty, Blonski said that he found it “too easy to be prescriptive with what they needed, to reduce them to a pronoun,” and that it took him some time to get over the “Savior complex.”

“I had to start from ground zero, from a place of compassion ... (SFP) truly serve rather than just going through the motions,” he said. “They are a voice for the voiceless and a haven of hope when another's life is shattered.”

Coburn, speaking through tears, told those gathered that SFP taught her how to budget and how to go about job-searching, not allowing her to “sit in self-pity,” and now she has a savings account, her own home and a car she bought on her own.

Rockingham County Superior Court Judge Andrew Schulman is currently deciding the case brought against the Town of Exeter by neighbors in opposition to SFP’s planned move, who fear their property values may go down as a result of the center’s proximity to them. His order is expected within one to two weeks.

When the decision comes down, look for coverage in the News-Letter and at www.seacoastonline.com