Furthering their education

Mandela Fellows from BSU tour Brockton supportive housing for homeless

By Sara Cline

BRIDGEWATER

Lavia Nabagaba, who is touring Massachusetts from Uganda, pulled out her phone to take pictures. But she wasn’t taking pictures of Fenway Park or Union Station. Instead, she was taking pictures of the Father Bill’s and MainSpring homeless shelter in Brockton, which she would soon visit.

“The American dream is not the same for everyone,” Nabagaba said. “People look at it from a different angle.”

Nabagaba is one of the 25 Mandela Fellows, hosted by Bridgewater State University, who are attending a six-week program where they visit institutions, attend events, meet residents and officials.

At the end of the program, the fellows return to their countries to share what they learned.

“Countries are battling the same problem, but it is clear our care is not on the same level,” Nabagaba said. “But when you talk about what we can improve on back home, it’s different.”

So what can we improve on back home?

The nonprofit believes in a “housing first” approach to ending homelessness – to first move people into housing and then address the issues that led them to homelessness in the first place.

In addition to housing, Father Bill’s and MainSpring provide various services that help people obtain skills, jobs and counseling.

“What I learned today is that we need to help people living in a crisis and then help them overcome that crisis and go back to a normal life,” said Omar Nfar, a student from Gambia. “We can not have anyone living on the streets.”

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