

Bootstraps' new chief eager to get working

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BEVERLY — After 13 years as the development director at Beverly School for the Deaf, Sue Gabriel wasn't looking for a new job.

But she started Monday as the executive director of Beverly Bootstraps.

"That was not a decision I made easily or lightly, but there was something calling me here," she said.

When she heard Bootstraps Executive Director Tom Gifford stepped back from the position, she was intrigued enough to make a phone call.



"When I interviewed with the board, I felt like I was home," she said. "I clicked and connected so well."

The agency runs a food pantry on Cabot Street and a thrift shop on Rantoul Street and provides outreach services such as literacy classes and housing assistance. Gabriel has been donating to the nonprofit for years, dropping off food, checks, backpacks and even an old car once, when she heard a family was in need.

"I was passionate about the cause and mission, and I truly feel honored to be here," she said.

In May, Gifford decided to focus more on the food pantry and is writing a book about the history of the organization. He's staying on full time as the founder but launched a national search for someone with experience in fundraising and managing future growth to take over as executive director.

"(Gabriel) was the very best qualified of all the applicants," Gifford said.

As the development director at the Beverly School for the Deaf, Gabriel said her work primarily involved writing grants, organizing events, soliciting donations, and building relationships with people and other organizations.

"A lot of what I did there will transfer here very naturally," she said.

Many people are feeling the pinch of rising costs, and more people are seeking help at Bootstraps.

"We really recognize at this point, with the economy being what it is, there's going to be a huge influx in clientele," she said.

Last year, the organization moved from the basement of the First Baptist Church, where it started 16 years ago, to a new building at 371 Cabot St., a building it plans to buy.

Gabriel said she's ready to carry Bootstraps into the future.

"I'm really excited to see what more this organization could do," she said. "My gut feeling is we're going to have to do more."

After three days on the job, she's not sure what "more" is yet, but she can't wait to figure it out.

"I knew I loved this organization before I even got here," Gabriel said. "This is, without question, going to be a very rewarding place to be."