

Service agencies gear up for sub-freezing temps

WEATHER

ServiceNet will turn to Salvation Army for extra beds for homeless; other crisis help available

By MARY BYRNE

Staff Writer

GREENFIELD — With temperatures dipping into the single digits during the next few days, area service agencies are working to provide warm options for people in need.

“On a night-by-night basis during these cold, cold nights, we’ll let people in and find space for them to rest in our common areas to the best of our ability,” explained Amy Timmins, vice president of community relations for ServiceNet, which manages the homeless shelter on Wells Street. “We’ll also work with the Salvation Army to secure alternative shelter space if needed. They’re our portal into the alternate shelter options for people.”

According to the National Weather Service, single-digit temperatures are forecast for much of Tuesday, with a high of 32 degrees Wednesday. The temperature isn’t expected to rise above freezing until Thursday.

Timmins said the Wells Street shelter is currently at capacity, with all 30 of its beds filled. However, the

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The men’s dormitory at ServiceNet’s Wells Street homeless shelter in Greenfield, where all 30 beds are currently taken.

STAFF FILE PHOTO/PAUL FRANZ

Agencies ready as cold descends

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shelter — which is no longer closed during the daytime hours — will work with individuals who go there to find a more permanent option.

“The risk of being outdoors during severely cold weather is high, and to the best of our ability we will be reducing that risk,” she said. “If we don’t have a bed for them, we’ll work to try and find them a bed for the following night.”

Masks and social distancing are required of guests of the shelter, she noted.

“Our concern right now is keeping people out of the bitterly cold weather and getting them situated in an appropriate spot as soon as we can,” Timmins said.

Community Action’s Fuel Assistance Program, for example, offers help to people across Franklin and Hampshire counties. People can call 413-774-2310 or 800-370-0940 for more information.

“We also have our Community Resource and Advocacy Program,” said Jessye Deane, Community Action’s director of communications and development. “They’re really our first line of defense in terms of meeting with folks who are in crisis situations, helping if there is a shut-off notice and working with folks in local vendors to work through payment plans.”

The nonprofit also offers a weatherization program, helping to make old New England homes a little more fuel efficient, she said.

The Living Room offered by Clinical & Support Options (CSO) at 140 High St. will be available again during the day this year, as well as the Wildflower Alliance (formerly the Western Mass Recovery Learning Community) on Chapman Street.

At a press conference in November, Mayor Roxann Wedegartner announced that city staff had been working with local community partners such as the Opioid Task Force of Franklin County and the North Quabbin Region, Salvation Army, ServiceNet, Greenfield Housing Authority, Community Action Pioneer Valley and the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness, among others, to “identify the gaps that expose our most vulnerable citizens to cold weather risks.”

While local service groups deal with the immediate need during the coldest days of the year, nonprofits like Community Action Pioneer Valley continue to work with individuals on long-term solutions for income-eligible people looking for help to heat their homes.

“Some of the things we see year to year is folks taking unsafe measures to heat their homes, like using miniheaters or using their oven,” Deane said. “We have a lot of older folks keeping their thermostat at 57 and wearing jackets and heated blankets.”

Deane added that Community Action works closely with local organizations that provide warming centers, as well as the Senior Center.

“We make sure our frontline staff are knowledgeable about area resources,” she said. *Reporter Mary Byrne can be reached at mbyrne@recorder.com or 413-930-4429. Twitter: @MaryEByrne.*