

The Warming Center Program Needs You

Written by Brent Adams, WCP cofounder



In the midst of a predicted El Nino Winter, Warming Center Program has begun its second year of operation. Even before December began, the center opened twice. The program is activated based on forecasted weather reports from the National Weather Service, which include temperatures of 34F° and below, 36F° following a day of heavy rain, and the Center also opens on a fourth day or more of rain at any temperature. Temperature data from the past six years indicates that the program would be open as many as 35 nights in the winter of 2012-'13, and so the program is readying itself to be open this winter for as many nights and more.

Research suggests that there are nearly 1,000 people experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz and only about 300 shelter beds, resulting in a large unmet need of warm and safe places for people to sleep.

The program utilizes a list of host site locations, such as churches and meeting halls in which to set-up the temporary shelter. The United Way 211 Information Hotline directs individuals to the specific location and hours of operation. A shuttle circles various areas where people typically congregate, including the Homeless Services Center and downtown. When the Center is located away from downtown, a shuttle depot is set up with hot drinks. Comfortable bedding, warm soup and hot drinks are available throughout the night. The program is intended to be all of the things that other local cold-weather shelters aren't, the door is open throughout the night allowing people to arrive very late, and dogs and personal items such as bikes and large backpacks are allowed. Guests are expected to follow basic rules that are maintained by the program administrator and a core team of organizers. Volunteers staff many of the over-night, and cleanup roles that are required each time the center opens.

The program is supported with donations and volunteers from the local community. An on-going blanket drive is conducted throughout the winter; clean, used blankets are acceptable.

To volunteer, or donate blankets or financial support email Brent at compassionman@hotmail.com

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