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Low temperatures mean record high for shelters

Daily Reporter-Herald, The (Loveland, CO)-January 7, 2010
Readability: 9-12 grade level (Lexile: 1110L)
Author: Jon Pilsner

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

Loveland's cold-weather homeless shelters are seeing a dramatic spike in clients, often more than twice the average numbers of past years, managers say.

The wintry weather has played an obvious role.

"This has been awful cold," said Will Gresham, who runs the day warming center. "We were open 28 out of 31 days in December, a new high."

On Tuesday, 30 people came to use the day shelter, Gresham said, and only three were users from last year.

"It's a new, younger group seeking shelter," Gresham said.

The night shelter, which rotates one week at a time among Loveland churches, has seen similar increases, said manager Doug Ashbaugh, who said the load could begin to strain his space and volunteers.

In the past, the average shelter population numbered between eight and 10 a night, Ashbaugh said. This year's average is closer to 18 or 20.

"It's just out of control," he said. "I think we're easily going to breach the 30 mark in the next couple of days, and if this weather doesn't break, we'll breach the 40 mark in another two weeks.

"We have a cap at 30, and I don't know what to do."

While Ashbaugh said nobody who needs help will be turned away, people at the shelter would have to stay on their best behavior or face immediate ejection for causing problems.

The shelter recently had a dispute that nearly turned physical, Ashbaugh said, and if the number using the shelter increases, that could be a sign of things to come.

If the population approaches 40, people will have to sleep very close to each other, and that sometimes raises tempers.

"Everybody sleeps differently," Ashbaugh said. "I bet 30 percent if not more snore, and some are incredibly loud, and every person's tolerance level of that is different."

Ashbaugh said some shelters end up being "like a jail," with volunteers enforcing rules all night, like police officers.

"We're really not at that stage, and I never want to go there, but numbers may force us," Ashbaugh said. "The more people you have in there, the more irritation, and some people snap and can't deal with it."

Gresham said the increased numbers also are putting a strain on his resources, meaning he needs to keep getting support from the community to handle the increasing numbers.

"That's all we can do," he said. "We just have to hope that we get donations from the generous folks of Loveland that allow us to keep providing something other than just a place for them."

Loveland's shelters

Volunteers operate a day warming center at 137 S. Lincoln Ave. where homeless people can come in from the cold. The shelter usually is open from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on especially cold days.

Contact Will Gresham at 215-6831 for information about the day shelter or to volunteer or donate.

Additionally, the House of Neighborly Service operates a night shelter on nights when the temperature is forecast to drop below 20 degrees. Local churches take turns hosting the shelter for a week at a time.

People who need the night shelter should go to the day warming center for pickup, usually between 5:30 and 6:15 p.m.

For more information about the night shelter, call Doug Ashbaugh at 667-4939, ext. 25.

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