
Loveland's cold shelter opens early

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When the weather turned from temperatures in the low 60s to sudden cold, snowy conditions Monday afternoon, Doug Ashbaugh knew he needed to open the Loveland night shelter a week early.

Ten people stayed that night, when temperatures dropped to 3 degrees, and 16 on Tuesday at the 137 Homeless Connection shelter, which is housed in 10 rotating churches from mid-November to mid-March.

"When the shelter first opens, it's a slow ramp up," said Ashbaugh, homeless program manager for the 137 Connection, a program of the House of Neighborly Service in Loveland.

Ashbaugh expected the ramp up to continue Wednesday to an estimated 20 people staying at the shelter, which likely will be kept open all week into next week, he said. The shelter, which can hold a maximum of 30 people, opens up when temperatures are 20 degrees or below.

"I am wondering if we're going to hit 30 two weeks from now," Ashbaugh said.

Thirty-two-year-old Brett Fosdick stayed at the shelter both nights, grateful for a warm place to sleep after his blankets in his tent got wet, he said.

"It's a good, solid meal, and it's a nice, warm place to sleep," said Fosdick, who got a driving under the influence charge and, consequently, lost his car and housing and has been homeless for three years.

"Pretty much since then it's been a battle all from a DUI," Fosdick said.

Fosdick, who stays in the night shelter on a regular basis, doesn't drink now, he said. He works in day labor and is skilled as a plumber but finds it hard to get a steady job without a source of transportation.

"Sometimes they provide transportation in the morning," Fosdick said about staying at the shelter. "When you've been out in the cold all night, you don't want to get up and go to work in the morning."

Sixty-year-old Larry Lowry also stayed at the shelter.

"It kept me from freezing to death," said Lowry, who receives disability payments and expects to get into permanent housing in early December after being on a six-month wait-list. "It's warm. It's got

cots. It's got blankets. It's nice to have your own place, but if you don't, it's hard to find a place to stay warm."

Last year, the night shelter reached maximum capacity the first week in January and remained at capacity for 45 to 50 nights during the winter season, compared with three to four nights the year before, Ashbaugh said. The shelter had to turn away one to three people a day, a number that likely would have been higher if word hadn't gotten out that the shelter was full, he said.

"I really think it's the economy," Ashbaugh said, giving as reasons a tight housing market with rising rental rates, an increased cost of living and a lack of full-time work for his clients.

The number of clients, or guests, staying at the shelter increases as the season progresses and the clients inform others about 137's offerings, Ashbaugh said. Demand also increases during deep winter when temperatures are at their lowest, typically in late December and into January, he said.

"The first cold snap hits, but they don't all run to the shelter. It's when it starts getting uncomfortable," Ashbaugh said.

During the warmer months, the day shelter is open in the mornings and for appointments and classes in the afternoons, but in the winter months, it's open both times at 8-11:30 a.m. and 1-4 p.m. At 5:30 p.m., the day shelter reopens to transport guests to the churches.

Shelter staff conducts a breathalyzer test on each guest, checks community service hours – guests are required to donate four hours a week in exchange for sleeping in the shelter – and takes down names.

This fall, the day shelter saw a higher-than-average number of guests of 20 to 28 people a day, compared with 12 last year, Ashbaugh said.

"We've had more guests this fall than we've ever had," he said.

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Photo:

Larry Lowry sits at one of the tables inside 137 Homeless Connection while talking Wednesday about how helpful it is to have the facility available. An early cold snap had organizers opening the facility a week earlier than planned.

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