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137 Connection to temporarily close

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The 137 Homeless Connection building is closing temporarily starting Wednesday in response to clients of the daytime service trespassing on the property during the night hours.

"We can't get them to stop sleeping on the sidewalk in front," said Doug Ashbaugh, program manager of the 137 Connection, a service provided through the House of Neighborly Service. "We're just going to close up for awhile."

The 137 Connection, 137 S. Cleveland Ave., provides a year-round day shelter with showers, laundry facilities and case management services and, during the winter months, a night shelter among rotating churches.

On and off for the past two to three months, some of the clients, called guests by 137 Connection staff, started sleeping in the area around the building, Ashbaugh said. Their trespassing increased over the last 1 1/2 to 2 weeks, generating complaints from neighbors and causing concern for shelter staff, he said.

"It's just accumulated to too many doing it," Ashbaugh said, explaining that he wants to avoid the issuing of trespassing tickets by the Loveland Police Department. "We can't have them here, so it's an ongoing battle."

Shelter staff repeatedly requested the guests move, but the guests -- roughly estimated from three to four up to eight people in the last 1 1/2 to 2 weeks -- continued trespassing on the property, Ashbaugh said. They also have been sleeping around the Loveland Museum/Gallery, the Loveland Municipal Building and the Pulliam Community Building, among other places, he said.

A year ago, a gate was added around the back of the shelter building to prevent guests from sleeping there, but now they are sleeping in front, Ashbaugh said.

Ashbaugh and Glorie Magrum, executive director of the House of Neighborly Service, decided Monday to close the shelter indefinitely to get control of the situation, Magrum said.

"When the day center closes, when there's no one here to monitor the building, the homeless will bring in some of their belongings," Magrum said. "This is a day center. The expectation is they come here on business."

While the shelter is closed, staff will discuss ways to monitor the building, Ashbaugh said.

"Some way we have to get the message to them," he said. "We don't want the place to go away permanently."

The temporary closure affects guests who use the shelter daily but are not trespassing there, Magrum said.

Laine Fry, a 31-year-old homeless Loveland resident, uses the shelter to shower and for its other services and will have to shower elsewhere, she said. A recovering methamphetamine addict who lost everything in a divorce in 2009, she is looking for work, she said.

"When I first became homeless, I relied on this place," said Fry, who moved to Loveland in March 2013 and starting using the shelter services then. "In summer it's not so bad. In the winter, this is the place we come and get warm. We socialize."

The shelter will close for a minimum of one to two weeks. Shelter staff are requesting that guests remove what they need from the lockers in the interim.

After Wednesday, guests possibly will have access to the shelter

on a weekly basis but no decisions have been made, Ashbaugh said.

"We don't want to have a time table," Ashbaugh said. "This is the time to do this. We can't have this in the winter when this is life-threatening."

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Photo:

Laine Fry talks Tuesday about how she will be affected when the 137 Homeless Connection closes. The day shelter for Loveland's homeless is closing temporarily because guests of the shelter have been sleeping outside the building which is against shelter policy. (Photo by Jenny Sparks/Loveland Reporter-Herald)

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