

## SHELTER: Many people rallied to make vital service happen

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several years. Shuler is a member of the shelter steering committee, is now providing meals for the shelter, and has opened her home to the first foster-dog.

Dawn Cooper of Sisters Family Access Network has been working tirelessly for years to improve conditions for those who find themselves without secure housing. She has the closest relationship with those who are lacking safe housing.

Sharlene Weed, executive director of the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity, is no stranger to the lack of affordable housing in Sisters and called the first meeting back in October, including Cooper, Shuler, Binks, Weed, and George Myers, who is a board member for the Bethlehem Inn in Bend. It was his encouragement of Weed that prompted her to convene that first meeting.

“With cold weather coming, we really wanted to see what resources we could find to help,” said Weed. “We were first mostly focused on the families with children ... finding housing.”

The shelter idea was also in the mix, while Cooper worked on finding housing for the families. Donations of tents, sleeping bags, and other outdoor gear were collected and dispensed by Habitat ReStore.

Myers volunteered to call church representatives as well as people from Shepherd’s House and Bethlehem Inn in Bend to come to the next meeting.

At the second meeting, Lois Kaping of Westside Church, Pastor Ron Gregg of Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, and Michael Black from VAST Church came. It was decided the church representatives would explore the cold-weather shelter idea.

Kaping is one of the lead volunteers for her church’s

Bread of Life food pantry.

“Our church was aware of the need for a cold-weather shelter but because of the size of the project, knew it would need to be an effort from a group larger than just us,” Kaping said.

“As things developed, someone had to take leadership. Lois and I were willing to be co-chairs,” Gregg said.

Kaping and Gregg have been involved with organizing and leading the effort. Recently, Gregg has secured legal documents to register “Sisters Warming Shelter” with the IRS and get an EIN number so people can get tax deductions for contributions.

Attorney Roger Nelson of Sisters has been providing free legal help in securing the appropriate documents.

Gregg has spoken about the shelter at Rotary and will speak to Kiwanis in February. Kaping attended a meeting at Shepherd’s House and their representatives came to the third meeting and helped to elucidate how the shelter was possible.

According to Weed, “Really, Lois is the champion. Just dogged in making the shelter happen and in short order — getting Westside to take the risk of being the first host and organizing everything.”

Binks reported that Kaping

took on a huge job dealing with the logistics of the shelter, the church, volunteer background-checks, the church’s insurance company, the fire marshal, interviews, and more.

“No one could have pulled this off on their own, that is for sure,” said Binks.

Weed also pointed to Gregg’s support as co-chair and Jennifer Seher setting up and managing the online volunteer sign-up site. Binks’ duties have included the donation drive, community outreach, volunteer recruitment, and coordination through the Facebook page.

Meetings grew from the original five people, to 12, to 20. The fourth and fifth meetings were announced to the public and more than 60 people showed up. There is a meeting on Thursday, January 12, 4 to 5 p.m. at Westside Church, and the public is invited. The Facebook page has almost 500 followers and all but three shifts in January are fully staffed. The February page is now available for signups.

“There were many individuals working behind the scenes, helping the shelter to open the doors,” reported Binks. “I have never seen such an amazing community effort! We could not have done this without everyone.”

prepare a meal or host a shift at the shelter. From the Facebook page there is a link to the signup page.

For January, the shelter is located at Westside Church at 442 Trinity Way. Sisters Community Church on Highway 242 west of town will house the shelter for February. The search is still on for a host facility for March.

Last Sunday, word was received of a very generous \$2,000 donation from a Sisters resident. Cash donations of any amount are always welcome and help make the mission of the shelter possible.

The shelter is open to anyone in need of a warm, safe place overnight when the outside temperature is below 32 degrees. Even if your electricity goes out, you are welcome for the night. Guests may check in between 6 and 10 p.m.

According to a post on the shelter’s Facebook page, “The Sisters Cold Weather Shelter is a success because of all of you!!! And, success in this case means so much... Nine people were warm, safe and well-fed last night. Three dogs were safe and cared for. Lives are being saved, humanity is filling our hearts, and this community grows, together.”

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