

Taskforce staffs warming center

By
Judy Hoyle
IVN Contributing Writer

“Homelessness comes in many different forms and homelessness doesn’t discriminate,” said Stacy Skinner. “I know there were two people who died in Cave Junction in the past two years because they were out in the elements, and I didn’t want that to happen again.”

Last year, the Illinois Valley Homeless Taskforce formed because a large homeless camp needed to be taken down. The state Department of Environmental Quality, the city and the county worked to clean it up.

“We have to have somewhere for them to go,” Skinner said. “We’re only open when it’s 40 degrees below or there’s a natural disaster.”

Skinner and Immanuel United Methodist Church Pastor Charles Chase were instrumental in establishing a warming center there.

“We started last February,” Chase said. “The impetus was a power outage last December. People in our community couldn’t stay warm in their homes so there was a temporary Red Cross warming center at City Hall. I contacted them to offer our facility and it developed from there. The Roseburg Red Cross gave us blankets and comfort kits of shampoo, lotion and razors and we got some WWII Army cots.”

The I.V. Warming Center opened on Valentine’s Day and stayed open through May of 2013.

“At that time, Kendall Phillips was the chair of the I.V. Medical Center, and he was instrumental in that organization giving us a \$500 grant for pillows and sleeping bags,” Skinner says. “Last year, it was just me, Pastor Chase and my husband, (Cave Junction Wastewater Treatment Facility manager Michael Bollweg), doing the work. I would take the grocery donations home, cook the meals, and then bring them in.”

“Mel Wilson is a huge help this year, she’s really stepped up,” Skinner said. “She was making bag lunches and handing them out to the homeless at Jubilee Park during the summer, and the natural transition was to help out at the shelter. Now, Dan McClain is there every single morning to fix breakfast and to help them get out so regular activities can take place in the church.”

Skinner said that Ashley Davis does food, blanket and clothing drives to help out and a lot of people also bring in food. There are also volunteers from Illinois Valley High School earning community service hours.

“These high school kids need to see the reality of how some people have to live,” Skinner said. “It’s a good experience for them.”

Skinner notes that many shelters are staffed, but local organizers expect guests to police themselves.

“We usually assign one or two of our overnight guests to be in charge, they have cell phones and they have our phone numbers and the deputy’s number,” she said. “This is our second season and we haven’t had a problem that we weren’t able to take care of ourselves. It’s a strike-one facility, if there’s a problem, they know we’ll have to close it down, and they’re very appreciative that they have someplace to go.”

Asked about who is using the facility, Pastor Chase said, “We’ve been able to help a lot of different people; mothers with their children who need a place to be for a night or two, and people that are just traveling through. Last spring we helped over 100 different people and we’re getting a lot of new people all the time who stay anywhere from a week or two.

“Right now we have a lady here every night who lost her apartment and is trying to get work and housing. Some people live in their car and just come in for meals. We have people who

have lost their jobs: a billboard painter, a 58 year old machinist and veteran, a retired shoemaker who’s trying to get into HUD housing and homeless teens who stay here because they have no place else to go.

“We try to solve problems,” Chase continues. “Some go out and work during the day and come back in, some stay in a motel for awhile, then come back when they run out of money. The Eagle veterans van takes veterans over to White City and back. Earlier this spring we helped a fellow with diabetes to return to Texas. We put him up overnight and got him a bus ticket back to his family.”

“We offer our church as a free WIFI hotspot and help people do resumes and get jobs,” Chase explains. “I’ve written letters on behalf of people trying to get jobs. Sometimes, just the fact that they’re homeless, they turn them away because they’re afraid.”

“We’re very grateful for our volunteers, people from our church and other churches and the Lifelines Food Bank who are helping. We have a couple ladies come in once a week, others help occasionally and provide food every other week,” Chase continues. “Last week we served 276 meals and housed 88 overnight. We average 400 meals and 140 beds a week. The people who stay, mop the floor, clean the tables, and do the dishes. They’re glad to do it, they do a god job and they’re appreciative too.”

Asked about the Warming Center needs, Chase said. “With this very cold weather, it would be ideal if we had a place for

them to go during the day. We feed them supper at night and breakfast in the morning, usually at 6 a.m. so they can catch the bus in to work. Our goal is to help people, but it takes a lot of manpower just to do that. Other churches are helping, but the need is great.”

Chase also lists needs such as toilet paper, Dawn dish soap, underwear, socks and other clothing; plastic storage bins, tarps, and funds to help pay for food, the electric bill and double pane windows for better energy efficiency. More volunteers are always needed to prepare and serve meals, do intake processing, check for medical issues and help clean the church.

“We’re a 501c3 and we can give a receipt for their tax records if they need it. To drop off donations, we have people at Nifty & Gifty, the church’s thrift store, open 10 to 2, Tuesday through Saturday; and we’d love to have someone write grants.”

“Our community is special in itself,” Skinner affirms. “It’s been a good experience for me. There isn’t one person I’m afraid of. I absolutely love the place where I live.”

Referring to the recent deaths of Jarred Houston, Aaron Clouser and others, Skinner states, “I know there’s been a lot of sadness lately, but I think through all the sadness that we as a community have gone through lately, I still believe the IV is a beautiful place to live. This year we’re going to have a Christmas tree and something special for each of them because they’re all human. They’re all somebody’s daughter or son.”



(Courtesy photo for The Illinois Valley News)

Hailee Kemmer, (left) Keyanna Augustadt, Mariah Nolan, Abby Miller and Sarah Bollweg, earn community service hours for IVHS at the warming center.



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