
Homeless get new day center

Shelter, hot meals available now; showers and laundry soon

BY ROBIN BROWN • THE NEWS JOURNAL • DECEMBER 16, 2010

A Wilmington-based nonprofit organization announced this week it is offering daytime shelter and hot meals for the homeless this winter.

And soon, it will offer free showers and laundry facilities.

The Homeless Outreach Center of Connections Community Support Programs, at 500 W. Eighth St. in the former West Presbyterian Church, is open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays and 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sundays.

The goal, spokeswoman Rebekah C. Robertson said, is to offer "a safe place to stay warm during bitter winter months and receive a hot meal seven days a week."

The center also offers the homeless help applying for public benefits, assistance finding employment, mental health and substance abuse treatment, food baskets and clothing, she said.

Primary medical care also is available at the site weekly in a partnership with St. Francis Hospital.

Renovations are under way on the center's lower level to install private showers, laundry equipment and a clothing closet, which are expected to be available for use next month.

Those who use the outreach center also benefit from the generosity of volunteer groups that visit "to help out and add some fun, especially during the holiday season," Robertson said.

For example, Girl Scout Troop 838 visited Dec. 11. They sang carols, donated a Christmas tree and hosted a tree-trimming party with ornaments made by troop members.

The next activity for those using the Homeless Outreach Center is a craft project starting at noon Saturday with volunteers from Archmere Academy in Claymont.

"Archmere will be donating small canvases and paint and will be assisting Connections' consumers as they express themselves creatively," Robertson said.

Such a program may be simple in a school setting, but taking it to the homeless has several levels of benefit, she said.

"Our consumers are rarely provided crafting opportunities, so this will be very therapeutic for them and will provide them with something they can take away with them and that will inspire them," she said.

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Connections has offered a variety of services since 1985.

This year alone, the agency expects to serve nearly 10,000 people at its 55 "grassroots locations" throughout the state.

Connections says its mission is to help "vulnerable and disenfranchised" residents improve their lives by offering "a comprehensive array of affordable and accessible primary medical, mental health and substance abuse treatment, employment and housing opportunities."

Its programs, Connections says, are designed to "help the individuals and families receiving the services to become accepted and productive members of their communities."

Connections also is one of the largest housing providers in Delaware. "With more than 500 units of permanent housing, we will provide 180,000 nights of safe, affordable housing this year," Robertson said.

Connections also offers case-management help and employment assistance for those "who have barriers to employment because of disability, criminal justice involvement or low rates of educational attainment," Robertson said.

Services are available "to anyone in Delaware who needs them, regardless of where they live, the extent of their problems or their ability to pay," she said in a statement.

For information about getting Connections services, call (866) 477-5345, toll-free statewide.

For information about volunteer opportunities or other ways to help the organization, visit www.connectionsosp.org or e-mail info9@connectionsosp.org.

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