



# Shelter Association of Washtenaw County 2018-2019 Winter Shelter Plans

## **THE WINTER SHELTER PROGRAM**

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The Shelter Association of Washtenaw County provides additional day-time and overnight emergency shelter and supportive services to individuals experiencing homelessness in Washtenaw County during the cold weather months. These services are part of the Shelter Association's effort to achieve our mission of ending homelessness in Washtenaw County by providing a place for individuals to not only get out of the cold and survive during the winter, but also operate as an access point to key supportive services. This emergency shelter offered at the Delonis Center and through key partner congregations also means access to basic need services including: laundry, phone, storage, showers, and mail. These basic services are designed to help those served preserve the dignity they deserve as they move from homelessness to housing.

The Winter Shelter program entails a maximum capacity of an additional 113 emergency shelter beds; including 62 beds for men in the 1<sup>st</sup> floor cafeteria, 26 beds on the second floor for women, and 25 rotating shelter beds hosted in partnership with 18 partner congregations throughout Washtenaw County. The winter shelter program also operates a day shelter that is provided off-site during the week at local congregations in the immediate Ann Arbor area and operates onsite at the Delonis Center on weekends.

The daytime warming accommodations are implemented by local organization MISSION through the management of SAWC. The daytime warming center rotated to five different congregations throughout the season that each provided an array of amenities to the clients. Amenities included onsite laundry and shower facilities, clothing closets, gifts, snacks, and gifts for the clients. The group focused on building community with guests and did this through activities and ongoing community meetings.

## **CHANGES OF NOTE FROM THE 2017-2018 WINTER**

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In the 17-18 winter, the winter shelter program was planned to operate from November 13th – March 31st. Because freezing cold temperatures often begin prior to mid-November or go well into April, for the 17-18 winter season, the Shelter Association made a commitment to extend these dates if needed due to weather. Due to below freezing temperatures in early April the warming shelter was extended until April 11<sup>th</sup>.

For the 17-18 Warming Shelter season, each individual provided emergency shelter was offered access to a variety of supportive services that began with the creation of a housing plan and linking to a variety of community resources including our community's housing prioritization list, specialized substance abuse treatment, income supports including employment services as well as an expedited social security process, and other individualized service needs. This marked a programmatic change from previous winter seasons. In prior seasons only those with income were given access to comprehensive supportive services.

Prior to this season, the SAWC staff also modified the policies and procedures for the warming shelter to continue focus on creating a welcoming atmosphere for guests. This entailed reducing rules and regulations related to warming shelter occupancy. The updated community guidelines are brief and focus on maintaining a respectful and safe environment and reducing shelter barriers inline with the emerging best practice of low-barrier shelter.

In addition, prior to the season SAWC further emphasized training warming center staff to ensure they are best equipped to work through conflict. This included training in trauma-informed care and de-escalation along with training from previous years focusing on use of Naloxone, CPR, and AED. SAWC experienced four potential overdoses this winter shelter season and each time was able to aid the individual in getting to the hospital prior to needing Naloxone or other life saving measures.

Also, to aid in having a successful warming shelter season, the Shelter Association added additional case management support late into the evening times each night. We also made every effort to schedule experienced staff during night and weekend shifts to avoid having the most inexperienced staff during those times.

During the 17-18 winter season, prior to the end of the season, there was also extensive surveying conducted with guests to find out what their plans were after warming shelter ended. This was primarily a case management engagement tool to work with them to identify safe, permanent housing.

## **PLANS FOR THE 2018-2019 WINTER**

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Although there were many successes this Warming Shelter season several key challenges emerged: a continued rise in the acute needs of our guests, a continued opioid epidemic that brings unique challenges to shelter operations, difficulty to capture real-time data entry with each presenting guest, and a lack of housing supports for such a large number of individuals in need.

As noted in the data analysis, there continues to be a rise in the percentage of clients that are disabled. This is in addition to a higher percentage of youth 24 and under (11%), seniors 55 and over (21%) needing shelter, and a high percentage of individuals with current substance use, particularly opioids. These subpopulations bring unique needs. For the 2018-2019 winter season, the Shelter Association is working to make more connections and deeper partnerships to local agencies that serve the younger and older adult populations including Ozone house, Area Agency on Aging, Home of New Vision & Dawn Farm, Ann Arbor Center for Independent Living, and Catholic Social Services senior program. Additionally, for the 18-19 winter season, the Shelter is working to continue training for new and current staff so they are best equipped to work with these populations in a caring and compassionate manner that best helps them move into safe, affordable housing as quickly as possible.

These training efforts are particularly important as the Shelter Association continues to utilize a low-barrier approach to shelter and keeping in mind that low-barrier shelter experience is a continuum; we continuously strive to improve in this area.

Another challenge faced is collecting detailed and accurate discharge data for those entering the system. The Shelter Association is working to do this by modifying our data collection standards and encouraging guests to support us in collecting data so that we can in turn use that information to aid in increasing resources and support for those that we serve. There has been an increased emphasis in hearing from guests in general through periodic onsite focus groups and other mechanisms for feedback that will be increased during the 18-19 winter season.