

Shelter Association of Washtenaw County 2017-2018 Winter Shelter Report

THE WINTER SHELTER PROGRAM

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 1st 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 FOR THE 2017-2018 WINTER

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 11th.

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.

DATA COLLECTION & LIMITATIONS

The Shelter Association maintains a commitment to collecting meaningful data to aid in improving program outcomes and for compliance with state and federal data collection mandates. Data for the Winter Shelter program is entered into the Homelessness Management & Information System (HMIS), a state & federally mandated system. Data is collected in line with our community efforts to coordinate entry for individuals experiencing homelessness.

To aid in obtaining accurate and timely data, the Shelter Association trained eight assessors internally for the 17-18 winter season. This included hiring an individual to aid in coordinating our data entry with local coordinated practices (i.e. coordinated entry-HAWC). During this season, the Shelter Association also made increased efforts to collect data related to clients experiencing specialized needs that may require them to need a higher level of care including an adult foster care or skilled nursing setting. Also, the Shelter Association made efforts to collect additional data related to the referral of outside local or out of county agencies to the Delonis Center. This effort was made so that the Shelter Association could contact these agencies to coordinate more effectively with them and decrease the chance of entities dropping off individuals with a special service need without prior advanced notice.

There are several limitations of data collection at the Shelter Association; the most frequent of which is client's exiting the warming shelter without notification of their destination. The Shelter Association makes every effort to minimize the chance of this happening by encouraging ongoing communication, striving to be a helpful and positive resource for those we serve, and reaching out to those that exit with an unknown destination via phone or alternative contact methods. Despite these efforts, 47% of those that exited the Shelter Association this winter did so with an "unknown" exit. In comparison to the 16-27 winter season, there was a 13% decrease in the number of "unknown" exits due to SAWC engagement efforts.

NUMBERS AT A GLANCE



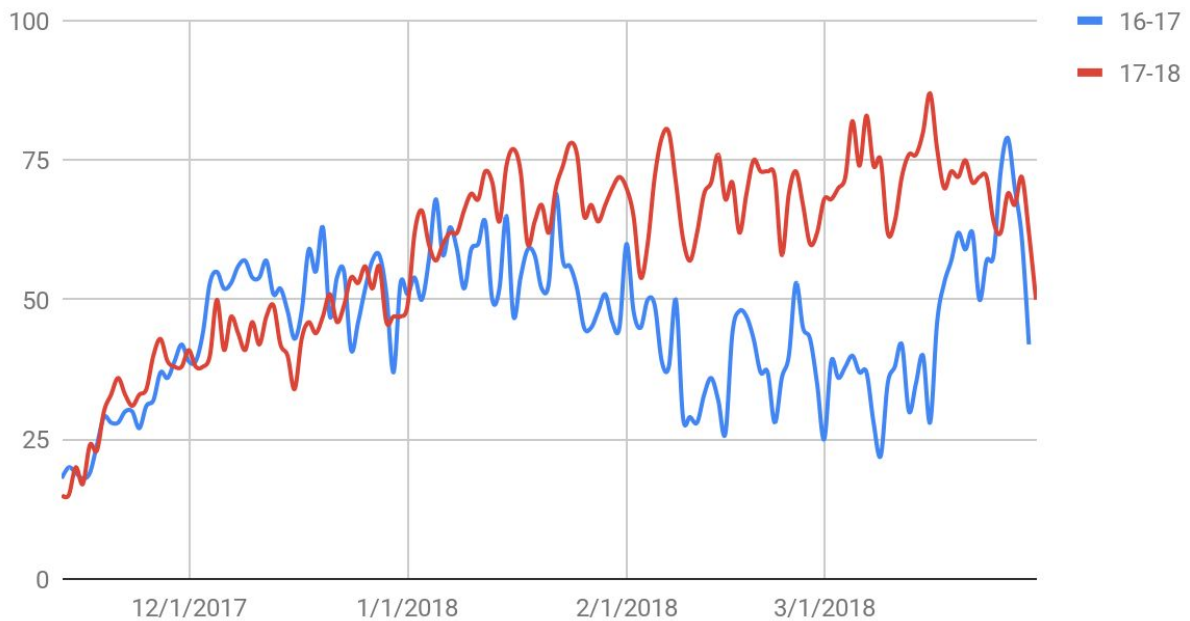
DATA ANALYSIS

There were several trends this Warming Shelter season that the Shelter Association can utilize to aid in improving this vital community program in the future. Overall, in comparison with the 16-17 winter season, there was a slight increase of 3% in the total number served (437 vs. 424). On average there were 58.4 individuals served each night an increase from 45.6 during the 16-17 winter season. This significant 28% increase in the average served each night coupled with the only minor increase in the total number served may be the result of several factors including: efforts to lower barriers to shelter stay, more on-site assessors to ensure a more seamless entry process, and increased training efforts.

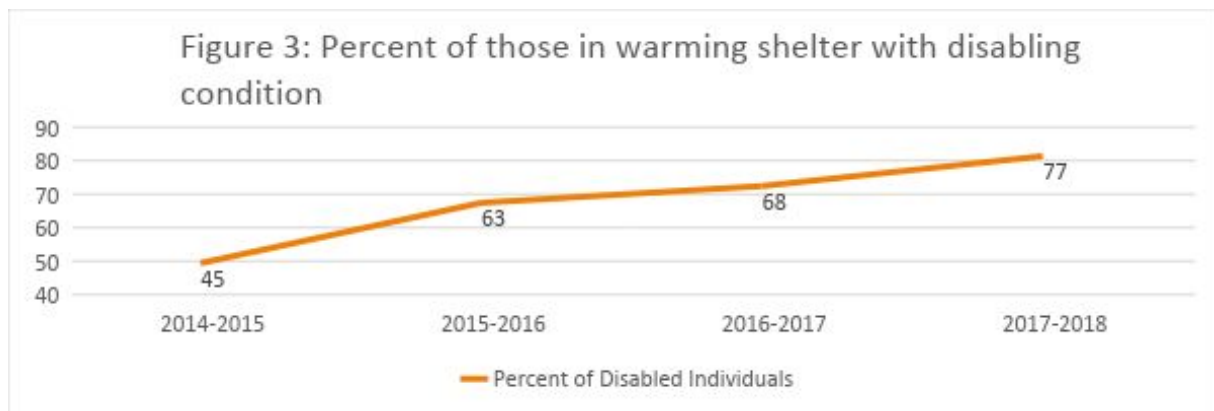
Figure 1 notes the nightly guest onsite census in the Warming Shelter program this winter in comparison to the previous 16-17 season. Beginning in late January, it is notable that each night there was a significant increase from the previous winter season. The increase beginning on January 31st, is an average of 32.9 individuals each night. This stark difference later in the season may also be a result of changes to reduce barriers and work to aid individuals to maintain access to the Delonis Center. This includes significant efforts to mediate guest conflict with staff and with other guests. Having more experienced staff in the evenings may have aided in reducing the number of individuals asked to leave the shelter premises as well. Additionally, it was reported that for the 2018 Point in Time (PIT) homeless street count, over 90% of the people counted were in shelter, leading to the lowest unsheltered count recorded.

LOW BARRIER EFFORTS: As previously mentioned, during the 17-18 warming shelter season, the Shelter Association made significant efforts to lower barriers in the provision of warming shelter services. As part of these efforts and a commitment to restorative justice, SAWC also removed a significant number of individuals from “trespass” status. Internally the number of individuals trespassed was reduced from 195 to 48 individuals, a drastic reduction of over 400%. The SAWC continues to review and work with these remaining 48 individuals with the ultimate goal of removing all “trespass” statuses from individuals. It is the Shelter Association’s practice to only terminate or suspend individuals in extreme circumstances due to acts of violence or theft.

2016-2017 & 2017-2018 Warming Shelter Census Comparison



This year nearly 80% of those served had a disabling condition, as highlighted in *Figure 3*. Over the last four warming shelter seasons, this need has nearly doubled increasing from 45% to 77% of those served. Although this increase may partially be attributed to increased quality in data entry by SAWC staff, we do not believe that is the primary factor for the increase.



THE HEART OF SUCCESSES - QUALITATIVE ACHIEVEMENTS

SAWC has made significant efforts to connect with new community partners this winter season. This included several new rotating shelter congregations including Second Baptist Church in Ypsilanti. This being our first congregation in Ypsilanti, aids in increasing collaboration with the greater Ypsilanti community. Additionally, SAWC has connected with the Ypsilanti Gathering Space, a newly formed weekly gathering for those in Ypsilanti to get together Thu-Sat afternoons of each week. There has been

discussion with this group about the creation of a daytime warming shelter space in Ypsilanti in future years if needed.

SAWC also made significant efforts to gain extensive feedback from shelter guests completing two focus groups and a lengthy survey following the warming shelter season. These discussions focused on questions related to the quality of warming shelter services and learning from the guests about how the experience could be improved. Highlights of this feedback included: a general appreciation for day shelter services, an overwhelming majority of guest being positive to low barrier changes, and positive feedback that there were consistent with staff present in the evenings. Areas of improvement highlighted: providing more amenities including better blankets and obtaining pillows, working to reduce noise, and the need for the warming shelter to be open longer during the season and to close later so guests are able to sleep longer. The SAWC has formed an internal warming center taskforce to work on improving in these areas.

THE HEART OF SUCCESSES - SUCCESS STORIES

The following success stories are imperative to highlighting the importance of SAWC warming shelter services beyond data and statistics:

Shawn is a young man in his early 20's who grew up with his Grandmother, until she passed away when he was 18 years old. Suddenly, Shawn found himself having to pay for the home he and his Grandmother were staying. He was eventually evicted. He couch surfed with friends for a number of months, however eventually had nowhere to go. During this time, he started drinking and began experiencing mental health related issues. After finding himself with nowhere else to go, he came to the Delonis Center and began staying in the warming shelter. While there his case manager Jessi connected him with mental health and outpatient substance abuse treatment and a local employer while also working on finding permanent housing for him as quickly as possible. Jessi was able to find him a housing unit at a local apartment complex in Ypsilanti and he moved into his own unit at the end of February 2018. Jessi continues to work with this client now that he has moved into housing. Shawn continues to engage in outpatient substance abuse and mental health treatment. He has future plans to enroll into school at WCC for a degree in construction management.

Jane found herself fleeing a domestic violence circumstance this winter; she had previously been homeless in Detroit due to these unfortunate circumstances. She had heard of the Delonis Center and so she came for help from Detroit. She began staying on the 2nd floor with the other women in the warming shelter. Her case manager, Sarah, quickly put together a housing plan with Jane and helped to encourage and empower her despite the difficult situation she was recently in. Only weeks after coming to the warming shelter, Jane found employment. Jane identified a need for mental health services through the onsite Packard Health clinic. She was rapidly linked to mental health services with Washtenaw County Community Mental Health. Jane's case manager advocated for Jane to receive services through the community housing prioritization process and Jane was selected for permanent supportive housing (PSH). She has a long term interest in the fashion and music industry.

*Names changed for confidentiality

CHALLENGES THIS SEASON & LOOKING AHEAD

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 next 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. This includes the creation of a *Training Plan* to facilitate high quality ongoing training efforts.

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. 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.