

Home of Refuge opens for county's homeless

Shelter to now serve year-round

BY GERRI HUNT

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EDEN — As volunteers diligently worked inside Home of Refuge Outreach Thursday evening, brisk temperatures began to fall outside — just the kind of weather the homeless shelter aims to prevent people living on the streets from having to endure.

For the last three years, as dictated by Eden city officials, the shelter has opened in mid-December and closed on March 31 — despite cold temperatures well into April, and hot summers. This time though, the city is allowing the shelter to remain open year-round — as long as there are volunteers and funding.

The facility is located at 1431 Fieldcrest Road, under the same roof as the Draper Fire Station. It's known as the Draper Community Building. It's lined with 15 sets of bunk beds — four for women and children near the kitchen, and 11 for men up a ramp on the far side of the building, donated by the Caswell County Prison in Yanceyville.

"We're looking for someone to make some rails for the top bunks," said Angela Hampton, a shelter volunteer and Eden councilwoman. "We assign the bottom bunks first, and won't use the tops until absolutely necessary."

Everything in the shelter has been donated, including a 43-inch flat-screen TV and plump sofas and chairs in the common area. A long dining table is set up nearby, where residents gather for community meals.

Four days before the facility opened, volunteers from Morehead High School's JROTC, Honor Society and Interact Club showed up to help with preparations — making the beds and helping supply each bed with a Bible and a small bin of toiletries.

"This shelter is very helpful to the community," said Jacob East, of Morehead's JROTC. "I grew up not having everything handed to



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Volunteer Dasia Paulino gets ready to unfold a blanket for a bunk bed at the homeless shelter.

me... but I was taught to make sure everyone else gets before you do."

East has donated outerwear to local coat drives, gives blood... and said he'd give someone in need the shirt off his back. And he asked Melissa Galloway, shelter director, if he could volunteer as an overnight host at the facility. She said they like to have two overnight hosts, and they should be at least 18 years old.

Galloway told the students they may have classmates who are homeless, but nobody realizes their situation because they make it to school every day.

"Don't think that every student standing beside you, that everything is hunky dory, because sometimes those students are homeless, are not getting anything to eat or getting clothes," she said. "We had a young man a couple years ago who was in the ROTC at Morehead, and he was in the homeless shelter. His desire was to finish and graduate, and he did... and worked for one of the plants here in Eden."

Two vans transport homeless people from across the county to the shelter daily — from the Reidsville Soup Kitchen around 4 p.m.; St. Stephens United Methodist Church in Madison around 4 or 4:30 p.m.; and the Salvation Army in Eden around 4:30 or 4:45 p.m.

"Morehead Hospital and Annie Penn Hospital call me when homeless people are hanging around the hospitals and need somewhere to

stay," Galloway said. "You'd be surprised at how many homeless people just ride around in their cars with their children."

The shelter residents arrive around 5:30 p.m., and churches and organizations from around the county provide hot meals. Residents eat breakfast each morning as well.

"There are two computers set up, so they can look for employment or do resumes, and we have people who come in and help them," Galloway said, encouraging students who are good with computers to volunteer to help the residents.

Volunteers and members of different organizations arrive every evening to help residents through workshops and classes.

"A lot of people say the homeless are drunks and drug addicts, but I beg to differ," Galloway said. "Homelessness has put on a totally different face now... now you are seeing families because they cannot afford their rent, or somebody died in their family and they get put out [on the street]."

She told the story of a housekeeper at Morehead Hospital whose grandmother went into hospice, and the family would not let her stay in the house.

"Our organization made sure she got to work every single day, and now she has her own apartment and is doing well," Galloway said. "So we not only house them, we try to find resources for them."

"You'll find people here with computer and engineering skills, just a little bit of everything, but certain things have happened in their life, and they just crash," she said.

Shelter residents spend the night, but must leave during the day — although at some point daytime workshops will enable participants to be in the shelter at that time.

Galloway said the shelter is looking for volunteers to help in its Supportive Resource Center, including support groups, computer classes, resume/interview preparation, parenting, spiritual guidance and more.

For more information on the 501(c)3 not-for-profit Home of Refuge, or to volunteer or donate, call Melissa Galloway at 336-791-3053 or Linda Clodfelter, shelter coordinator, at 336-791-3072, or the shelter itself at 336-635-1910.