



Shelters in MetroWest preparing to help homeless cope

By Brian Benson/Daily News staff
The MetroWest Daily News
Posted Jan 23, 2013 @ 12:01 AM

FRAMINGHAM –

Jim Bauchman understands what local homeless people may face this week as frigid temperatures descend on MetroWest.

Bauchman, the pastor of Framingham Street Ministries, was once homeless himself, but has spent the past decade trying to help those living on the streets. This week he worried how those still living in parks or other spots outdoors will cope with the cold.

"Finding food is not a problem," he said, noting the Salvation Army and United Way of Tri-County offer free meals or run food pantries. "Finding shelter is."

As the National Weather Service predicts temperatures will remain below 20 degrees Fahrenheit today and Thursday, with lows near zero at night, state emergency officials urged people to stay indoors. Agencies that help the homeless worked to ensure their clients have a warm place to sleep.

People, especially the elderly and young children, should minimize the time they spend outside. Anyone who will be outdoors should wear "several layers of loose-fitting, lightweight clothing, rather than a single layer of heavy clothing," the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency advised.

Other essentials include a hat, mittens, waterproof boots and a scarf.

Brian Calnan, of South Middlesex Opportunity Council, said the agency, which runs several shelters in MetroWest, had four beds available Tuesday afternoon. Staff will work with agencies in Boston, Fitchburg and elsewhere if they cannot meet the demand locally.

"The need has been pretty steady," said Calnan, director of SMOC's Common Ground Resource Center. "Obviously, there's more urgency when the weather gets like this. ... Our intensity is stepped up. Everyone is putting their best hand forward and hopefully someone will grab it."

Calnan said some people refuse the offer of shelter, but the agency will continue to reach out to them.

The agency has an outreach worker who works with police, the Salvation Army and United Way to identify people who need a place to stay warm.

"We do everything we can to make sure anyone who wants a roof over their head has one," Calnan said.

It also works to move people who have a stable income from shelters into more permanent rental housing the agency also oversees.

Nilsa Roman, with Human Services in Marlborough, said she directs homeless people seeking shelter to SMOC.

Bauchman, who regularly distributes blankets, coats and bedrolls to people living around Framingham, estimates there are about 20 people living outdoors in Framingham. He said he often sees the same people year after year as they do not follow through with detox programs.

"It's like an endless cycle," Bauchman said. "It just keeps on reoccurring, reoccurring and reoccurring."

Brian Benson can be reached at 508-626-3964 or bbenson@wickedlocal.com.