

The Importance of Warming Centers

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Photo: Living Hope Church opens doors to homeless.
www.columbian.com

A warming center is a place where the homeless can go during the cold winter nights to receive shelter. This is a temporary shelter when the temperatures drop to freezing or there is some combination of windchill and rain or snow. Their primary goal is to reduce the hypothermia related deaths among the homeless population. Some shelters even allow pets, though the policy will vary by shelter. Warming shelters play a very important role in keeping the homeless, specifically the elderly, warm and safe during the cold winter nights.

Many warming centers also provide a hot meal to the homeless and hot drinks. Even if that hot meal is only a bowl of soup and some tea, they do their best to offer something. For some of the people sleeping in the center, this may be their only hot meal for a while. Some shelters also offer games for things to do for the children that accompany their families to the centers.

Warming shelters can be found in many towns across the country. Many times, churches will open their doors to shelter those in need of warmth. In my town, in addition to several churches that serve as warming centers, one of the food banks also serves as a warming center. Many warming centers rely on volunteers or donations to offer their services to the homeless.

Many people are often concerned that some of the homeless population may not know about the centers, or they're not sure when they're opened yet. Some people don't quite know how to approach someone to tell them about warming shelters. The warming centers in Multnomah County, Oregon tells people that if you see someone on the streets and you are concerned that they may need assistance you can call the non-emergency police number and the police will come and give them assistance by either directing them to a center, or helping them get to the shelter.

Many homeless shelters desperately need volunteers and donations. Volunteers will usually have to go through a short class before actually volunteering, usually on a weekend a few weeks before the projected opening of the center. Centers can always use donations of socks, gloves, and coats to keep the homeless warm when they have to be on the streets. They also love donations of cots, sleeping bags, and food and water. Any donation helps, and a little really can go a long way.

Unfortunately, not everyone shares the opinion that warming centers are a benefit to the entire community. A letter sent to the Atascadero, California city council details the disdain toward the idea of opening a warming center in the national guard armory in Atascadero. The letter reads, “Why would you subject the members of the National Guard who voluntarily spend their time in service to their country to the filth, unsanitary, and unsafe conditions the ‘homeless’ typically leave behind every place they gather any more than you’d invite them into your own homes.” It is an unfortunate letter that reminds us not everyone shares the opinion that it is important to help others.

Even though some have the opinion that we should not have warming centers, that seems to be the minority. Warming shelters are needed, and there should be at least one in every town across the country. They are so important because we need to take care of our community.

Sources:

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