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Help for homeless - Resource center to open in September

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By Sarah Bultema

Reporter-Herald Staff Writer

For the past four winters, when the weather was especially cold, homeless community members had a place to stay warm, thanks to the inclement weather shelters created and run by volunteers and the House of Neighborly Service.

Now, the people involved are hoping to offer another step of assistance and opportunity to Lovelanders living on the streets with plans to open a year-round homeless resource center.

In September, the House of Neighborly Service will open 137 Homeless Connection, which will operate in the same city-leased building on South Lincoln Avenue used for the inclement day warming center.

Yet instead of just providing shelter, the building will be transformed to house an in-depth program that offers homeless residents case management, support and the connections to resources they need to improve their lives.

"We're stepping up our goals for what we can accomplish," said Glorie Magrum, executive director of the House of Neighborly Service. "It's not just a warm place, but really a partnership to change their situation."

The idea of offering more extensive help to homeless individuals has been a goal ever since the inclement weather shelters were founded by volunteers, including Loveland's Doug Ashbaugh.

"From the very beginning it's always been about making a safe place to get off the street," said Ashbaugh, who now works for the House of Neighborly Service.

But it wasn't until last week, after the city of Loveland approved use of the building year-round and allocated partial funding for the center, that the program was able to move from a dream to reality.

Now the House of Neighborly Service can hire a coordinator to run the program, which will be open to any homeless community members interested in moving forward.

To start, the day center will be equipped with basic amenities the homeless may need, including mailboxes and lockers.

Additionally, it will offer personalized casework in which staffers can begin to identify problems holding a homeless person back.

From there, coordinators can connect the individual to the resources he needs to solve the problem.

For example, if a person can't begin looking for work because he doesn't have a birth certificate or identification card, a caseworker can help him go through the steps to get one.

Or if a homeless resident has a mental illness, he will be referred to the Sister Alice Murphy Center for Hope in Fort Collins, which already offers services for those needs.

"What we're going to do is encourage you to improve your situation," Magrum said.

Unlike the House of Neighborly Service's main office - which addresses emergency needs and serves about 21,000 people each year - this program will get to know homeless individuals on a one-on-one basis.

"They'll be encouraged on a mentor level," Magrum said.

Yet while the center will offer opportunities for those interested in improving their lives, it will not get too involved with those who are happy being homeless.

The inclement weather shelters will always be open to anyone in need, but the year-round center's amenities will be limited to those working to get off the streets.

"For the transient or chronic homeless, this will not be a home to them long term," Magrum said. "Our community cannot support that."

But for those who do want to change their lives, the 137 Homeless Connection will do all it can to help them achieve it, she said.

"Success would be to see homeless folks use what we have to offer and know there is hope for them," Magrum said.

Ashbaugh added, "We can do some great things here."

The center, which is to open in mid-September, will begin as a one-day-a-week program. By the end of the winter, coordinators hope to keep it open five days a week.

But first, they need support from the community, through both donated time and money.

People interested in volunteering or contributing to the 137 Homeless Connection can call the House of Neighborly Service at 667-4939.

Doug Ashbaugh and House of Neighborly Service Executive Director Glorie Magrum explain what the new 137 Homeless Connection on South Lincoln Avenue hopes to provide for the homeless community of Loveland.

Doug Ashbaugh points out where the front desk will greet guests at the new 137 Homeless Connection.

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