

Blackstone Valley Emergency Shelter PROGRAM MANUAL

Purpose and Call

So many people in our society are overlooked, under served and in need of a helping hand, especially during the harsh winter months. Many right here in our own community do not have a warm place to sleep at night, are their lives are endangered by the cold and snow. As a community of faith, we have seen this need and feel called to respond by literally opening our doors and offering a warm welcome to all those in need. We believe that this kind of loving care is at the center of our call to discipleship, and that anything that we do for the least of these, we do for Christ.

Program Description

Our desire is to become a temporary winter shelter, opening our doors on the harshest of nights from 7pm to 7am in order to provide protection for men, women and children in need (we will be open 9pm to 7am on Monday nights when the Boy Scouts will be meeting). In conjunction with the Northbridge Police Department, we will decide 24 hours in advance which nights that we will be open, not to exceed seven days in a row or 35 days annually. Sleeping quarters will be arranged in the Fellowship Hall, with the middle divider and back classroom divider setup. This allows for a common area in the front of the Fellowship Hall, a private women's sleeping area on the left and a private men's sleeping area on the right. Additionally, the middle classrooms can be setup as Family Rooms. Unaccompanied minors cannot be accepted. At this time, plastic mats will be provided for sleeping on, but there are no immediate plans for linens or blankets.

Due to safety considerations, a maximum of eight male guests can be housed in the Men's Sleeping Area, seven female guests in the Women's Sleeping Area and one parent / legal guardian with up to four minors in the Family Sleeping Areas can be housed per night. The downstairs men's and women's restrooms are available for use. The upstairs bathroom should only be used in case of a plumbing emergency. Guest are expected to remain in the Fellowship Hall for the duration of their stay, and the rest of the church would be off limits.

Check-in & Registration

Each guest is required to fill out a Registration Form with basic health information and a release of liability. These forms will be kept on file, and only need to be filled out once per guest. Each guest entering the building needs to sign in by signing the "Guest Sign In Sheet." For safety reasons, it is imperative that we keep an accurate count of how many individuals are in the building at all times. After 9pm, the doors will be locked for the evening. In case of a personal emergency, guests may leave at anytime, but will not be permitted to reenter the shelter. If no guests have arrived by 9pm, the Shelter will be closed for the evening and the first shift of volunteers may go home after notifying the remaining volunteers.

Call the Northbridge Fire Department after the doors are locked for the night and report how many overnight guests and volunteers are present each night. They can be contacted best by calling the police department at 508-234-2111.

Sleeping Arrangements

Sleeping quarters will be arranged in the Fellowship Hall, with the middle divider and back classroom divider setup. This allows for a common area in the front of the Fellowship Hall, a private women's sleeping area on the left and a private men's sleeping area on the right. The two classrooms off of the Fellowship Hall can be setup as Family Rooms for one parent / legal guardian with up to three children.

See Documents 1-3 for diagrams of sleeping areas and room setup.

Quiet Hours

Quiet hours are enforced in the sleeping areas between 10 PM and 7 AM. However, sleeping areas should be kept as quiet as possible at all times.

Food & Safety

According to the Board of Health, any food that would be provided must be prepared under the supervision of a ServeSafe Certified individual, though coffee and tea may be prepared and served by volunteers. The plastic sleeping mats, as well as any blankets, linens and pillows that we choose to add later would need to be washed between usage by different individuals.

First Aid Kit & Sharps Disposal

There is a First Aid Kit and Sharps Disposal container available in the kitchen in the cupboard above the microwave. These resources are to be used under the supervision of the shelter volunteers. Please notify the Shelter Coordinator if supplies are running low or if the sharps disposal container is full.

Behavioral Issues

In the case of unsafe or belligerent behavior, guest may be asked to leave at the discretion of the volunteers. Possession or use of drugs, alcohol or weapons is cause for immediate expulsion. If a guest does not leave when asked by the volunteers, call 911 in order to contact the Northbridge Police Department for assistance.

Alcohol, Drugs & Weapons

Alcohol, illegal drugs and marijuana are not allowed in any shelter. **Any person under the influence of alcohol, drugs or marijuana will not be admitted into the shelter.** Weapons, of any type or nature, are also prohibited, except those in the possession of law enforcement officers. Anyone in possession of drugs, alcohol or weapons or found to be under the influence and disruptive will be asked to leave the shelter and not be allowed back in.

Smoking is not permitted on church grounds, inside or out. In respect of our neighbors, please dispose of your cigarette butts appropriately.

Volunteers

There will be at least two volunteers at the shelter at all times, including at least one male and one female volunteer. Volunteers are required to fill out an application, sign a release of liability, abide by our volunteer code of conduct and pass a CORI Check. Volunteers must also complete a training before they are able to serve, which will cover shelter procedures, emergency policies and some basic training in conflict resolution. Volunteers must be 18 years or older in order to interact with our shelter guests, but there may be other ways in which minors may support this ministry.

You are responsible to stay on site until the next shift arrives. If for some reason the next shift does not come, please stay for the following shift or call the Shift Coordinator to arrange a replacement.

The volunteer schedule is as follows:

- Setup Crew: 6:30pm – 8pm
- Shift 1: 6:30pm – 11pm
- Shift 2: 11pm – 3am
- Shift 3: 3am – 8am
- Cleanup Crew: 6:30am – 8am

Opening Criteria

Our desire is to find three other churches that will each agree to opening their doors one week a month so that warm overnight housing can be available all winter long. Until then, the Program Coordinators will use the following criterion to determine whether or not we will open, always making the decision at least 24 hours in advance.

Based on these guidelines, we can plan ahead by looking at the extended forecast and lining up volunteers ahead of time, making the final decision whether or not to open the day before.

We will open when any of the following are met: (weather predictions based on accuweather.com)

- “RealFeel” overnight low predicted to be below 15 degrees Fahrenheit
- Three or more inches of snow are predicted overnight
- At the request of the Northbridge Police or Fire Departments, or upon referral by Catholic Charities

Getting the Word Out

When the decision is made to open on any given night, the Program Coordinators will notify Catholic Charities and the Police and Fire Departments. In addition, a recorded message will be left on the Blackstone Valley Emergency Shelter Phone Line, telling individuals when the shelter will be available and where to go to request assistance.

Guidelines for Addressing Behavioral Issues

Suggestions for Dealing with Agitated People

- Avoid an audience--isolate the person to discuss the matter
- Look for and remove anything that could be used as a weapon, including chairs
- Stay at least an arm's length away—don't corner them or block the room exit
- Speak calmly, lower your voice tone to slightly below theirs—don't touch them
- Engage them in conversation—boil their complaint down to something specific
- Treat them with respect, adult-to-adult interaction
- Be prepared to set limits—enforce basic site rules
- If they threaten violence or appear dangerous, be ready to call 911—decide ahead what is the line they shouldn't cross
- Go as a team, if possible — 1 to speak, 1 to remove weapons

Hallucinations

Anyone overtly psychotic is responding to internal stimuli. Help them anchor to reality by engaging in matter-of-fact discussions: "Are you taking medicine? When will you see your doctor again?" Err on the conservative side and if you are unsure how to handle a guest who seems to be suffering from mental illness, and call the paramedics.

Suicide

If someone is talking about suicide, offer them the phone to call the 24/7 Crisis and Referral Hotline at 1-800-273-8255 where trained workers can deal with them. Some people talk about suicide, but don't have a "plan," (are not ready to implement). If they ask you to keep it secret, tell them you are concerned about them and cannot keep the secret. You might enter into a verbal contract that they will not do anything without telling you first.

Drug Dependent Response

- Avoid expressing an attitude of disapproval.
- Avoid confrontations and accusations.
- Don't try to break through denial that a problem exists (don't argue).
- Support and encourage any decision they make to get help.
- Communicate a sense of acceptance. Express your appreciation of their good and healthy behavior.

Chemically Induced Response:

- What has been taken?
- How large a dose (how many pills, etc.)?
- What time was it taken?
- How much does the person weigh?
- Call the Poison Control Hotline at 1-800-222-1222, which is available 24/7. They will tell you what behaviors to expect, how long the trip may last, and whether it is important to have emergency medical help called.
- If medical help is required call 911.

Epileptic Seizure Response:

- Protect the guest from injury. Lower them gently to the floor. Remove any objects, such as chairs, which may cause injury. Loosen constrictive clothing.
- Do not interfere with convulsive movements by restraining the guest. You may cause injury. Let the seizure run its course.
- Do not attempt to force anything between the teeth or into the mouth during the seizure.
- Be sure the guest has an open airway and that breathing resumes after the seizure subsides.
- Do not attempt to give fluids, or throw water on the guest's face.
- When consciousness is regained, you can aid the guest's reorientation by saying who you are, what time it is, and where he or she is. Stay with the guest awhile to help allay anxiety and confusion. The guest will feel fatigued and need to rest.
- Watch for increased respiratory difficulty, shift in intensity or site of pain, color of skin or anything else that may be helpful if further medical attention is needed. Medical attention should be obtained promptly if another seizure occurs, if guest is pregnant, or if injuries occurred as a result of the seizure.

Infectious Diseases

- Many infectious diseases are transmitted through the air or are passed into bloodstream of another only through semen, blood, vaginal fluids & breast milk.
- As a basic precaution, assume everyone working and staying at the site is carrying one of these viruses.
- Never allow blood, sputum, vomit, or feces to enter your body through an open wound, or the membrane of your eye.
- Make sure all open sores on hands and face are covered. Avoid severe chapping of the skin.
- If you suspect you have come in contact with either disease, go to the nearest emergency room within four hours for testing, counseling, and precautionary measures.
- Move those who are coughing away from the rest of the other guests. If this is not possible, have the person facing away from the faces/heads of others. Coughing toward another's feet is best.

Lice

- Guests with lice should be separated from other guests.
- Lice do not fly, they crawl fast.
- Linens should be washed separately in hot, soapy water.
- Good vacuuming is critical.

Facilities Manual

Lights

Light switches for the hallways are located at the top and bottom of both stairs. The kitchen lights are located inside the doorway directly off of the hallway. The lights in the Fellowship Hall can be turned on and off individually, allowing for the lights in the common area to remain on while the lights in the sleeping quarters are off. Most of these lights are controlled by the light panel right inside the Fellowship Hall on the side nearest to the Men's Restroom. The remaining lights are controlled by the light switch in the front of the Fellowship Hall between the classrooms.

The Electrical Panel is located in the Boiler Room, right off of the kitchen.

Heat

The thermostat to the Fellowship Hall is located at the front center of the room. On nights when the shelter is open and guests are present, manually raise the temperature to 68 degrees for the hours between 7am and 11pm, and 64 degrees from 11pm to 7am.

Locking & Unlocking Doors

When arriving for the evening, unlock the ramp door to allow guests to enter. A key to unlock the door from the inside should be hanging on the nail to the right of the door. This key gets inserted into the hole on the push bar and twisted until the locking device retracts and the door can be freely opened from the outside.

This door is to remain unlocked from 7-9pm as guests arrive for the night, and needs to be monitored at all time by a volunteer. The doors are to be locked for the night at 9pm, after which time, we can no longer accept guests. To relock the door, insert the key into the push bar and twisting the opposite direction.

Plumbing Emergency

In case of a plumbing issue in the restrooms, please shut off the water supply by turning the knob located at the base of each toilet firmly to the right. A sign can be put on the door indicating that the facilities are not in service, and the Handicapped Restroom upstairs can be used if needed.

Fire Alarm

In case the fire alarm goes off, evacuate all guests and volunteers from the premises and meet in the Unibank Parking Lot to perform a headcount. Call the Fire Department to report the alarm.

Severe Weather Procedures

For safety purposes, the ramp and exit way must remain free from snow and ice in order to ensure safe for passage at all hours. Please be diligent about shoveling and salting the ramp as needed in severe weather. Snow shovels and salt will be located by the ramp door, or right up the stairs by the door closest to the ramp.

Emergency Contact Person

If you encounter a facilities issue, that requires IMMEDIATE attention, please contact Shelter Coordinator Leslie Reichert at 508-751-0799. For all other issues, please fill out an Incident Report and inform Leslie in the morning.