

Overflow homeless shelter is open

25-bed former fire station now serving women and families

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WAUKESHA — It took a lot of hard work from dozens of volunteers, but the former Fire Station #3 at 1210 Sentry Drive has officially opened as an overflow homeless shelter for women and children.

The 25-bed shelter welcomed its first guests — eight women and children — on Sunday night, according to Nicole Angresano, board member with the Housing Action Coalition of Waukesha County and vice president for Community Impact for the United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County.

The Housing Action Coalition (HAC) is still in the process of purchasing the former station with the end goal of turning it into a long-term winter overflow shelter and housing resource and services center, but while it finalizes that purchase it has received permission from the city to use the space as an emergency overflow shelter for what continues to be a bitterly cold winter.

The shelter is currently being run by the Milwaukee-based nonprofit Community Advocates and is expected to be in operation this season through April 30.

Who it will serve

Referrals to the shelter are expected to follow a pretty typical standard. When other shelters in the county serving homeless women and children, such as Hebron House and the Women's Center, are at a capacity, they will send the homeless women and children that get referred to them to the overflow shel-



Cara Spoto/Freeman Staff

The former Fire Station #3 at 1210 Sentry Drive, seen here on Monday evening, welcomed some of its first guests as an overflow homeless shelter on Sunday night. The 25-bed capacity shelter is designed to serve homeless women and children who can't find shelter space at other Waukesha shelters.

ter, Angresano said.

The expectation is that the shelter will primarily serve women and children from Waukesha County, she said, but there is a chance that some women and children could hail from other places in the region from time to time.

"First of all, homeless shelters are not going to bar people from taking shelter if their zip code doesn't align. That's a non-issue as far as I am concerned," she said. "The reality is that this is a fluid population. We know right now there are people from Waukesha that are in Milwaukee shelters."

That being said, the shelter is located in Waukesha, Angresano said, and the HAC is pretty confident that "due to the location of the shelter, most if not all clients will be from Waukesha."

"This shelter is designed with the purpose of serving Waukesha County's overflow situation," she added. "Not every homeless person in Waukesha County is from Waukesha, but the vast majority are."

The fact that a Milwaukee nonprofit is running the shelter has no bearing on who gets into the shel-

ter, she noted.

Operations

Right now, the shelter is slated to open each day at 3 p.m., Angresano said, but with the extreme cold it is expected to stay open throughout the day to shelter those women and children who do not have school or a job to go to during the day.

Families and single women won't face a limit to the number of days they can stay at the shelter, she said, as long as spaces don't open up for them at other shelters in the county that serve women and children.

Residents will receive breakfast and a hot supper each night, as well as lunch on those days where it is too cold to venture outside.

So far, the nonprofit has had both individual and corporate volunteers sign up to provide those hot meals, Angresano said, including ProHealth Care, Old Navy in Oak Creek, and La Casa de Esperanza.

"We are hoping to rely on volunteers to provide the meals, but we also have money set aside so if we don't have volunteers signed up the clients will still get a hot meal," she said.