

Questions about St. Aidans providing overflow Warming Center operations

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What would we be committing to?

We are proposing that St. Aidan's agree to provide a warming center for Boulder Outreach Homeless Overflow (BOHO). The center would be scheduled for the same week night all the season, but each week it would actually open only if the operating criteria were met on our night.

What are the criterion for opening the center on our scheduled night?

The decision is actually made by BOHO, but the basis is a forecast of an overnight low of 32 degrees or less accompanied by precipitation, or below 25 degrees and dry.

How often is that likely to be?

BOHO has opened shelters on 30 nights since the season started in October. That is roughly 30 nights out of 90. The season probably runs till the end of March, but that may depend on the weather.

Who else is doing this, and what has their experience been?

There are currently three Boulder churches operating warming centers with BOHO. They are the Boulder Mennonite Church, Crestview Community Church, and Cornerstone Church. We talked with Pastor Karen Cox, Brian Carluchi at Crestview, and Doug Kennedy at Cornerstone. All had a very positive view of the program, although they said it did require some management effort and realistic expectations about the population they are serving.

What is the expectation for staffing the program?

We will have a program director and volunteers, but BOHO provides the primary operational staff.

What is the BOHO staff responsibility?

The BOHO staff is responsible for all normal operations of the center. The center will not open until the BOHO staff is present and ready to receive the guests. This includes opening the center, receiving the guests, maintaining order when necessary, the primary responsibility for dealing with any emergencies, and cleaning up in the morning.

What is the St. Aidan's volunteer's responsibility?

We propose that St. Aidan's provide a host, or preferably two, all hours that the center is in operation. These people would represent St. Aidan's to the guests, but would primarily have a ministry of presence. They would also do preparation and cleanup for any morning food service that we choose to provide.

How do we deal with medical or behavioral issues?

These issues will primarily be the responsibility of the BOHO staff members. Our hosts should refer any such issues that come to their attention to the BOHO staff whenever possible. Otherwise they should call 911 and have the issue resolved by professionals.

What training do our volunteers need?

Since our volunteers will be hosts, rather than operating staff, they do not need any special training for the warming center operation. All warming center operational questions would be referred to the BOHO staff. However, we would expect all our volunteers to receive training on expectations and practices for interacting with persons who are homeless.

What facility is needed?

We provide only sleeping space and restrooms. BOHO's expectation is that all other facilities, including kitchens, are closed during center operations.

What start-up or ongoing costs are involved?

There is no required costs, but the guests are issued blankets. BOHO would appreciate it if we could provide those. The only ongoing cost would be any morning food we choose to provide.

Will we be insured? If so, what is the cost?

Adoption of the program is not likely to cause a change to the cost of our insurance. The insurance we provide would only cover the church, not BOHO or any other related agencies, although they do have their own insurance. We would also notify the police and fire departments of St. Aidan's participation.

What we supply

We provide sleeping space, rest rooms, and preferably blankets, with the rest of the facility closed (including the kitchen). We would like to be able to serve coffee and a light snack (e.g., muffins or donuts) in the morning.

Do we need separate facilities for women or families?

We would not be expected to provide separate sleeping space by gender, and none of the warming other centers have. There have not been any families so far this year, but if that were to occur, the ability to provide the family an isolated area would be desirable.

Operational Notice:

BOHO would call us with official notice no later than 4:00 for the night's operation. The decision is delayed to get the most accurate forecast possible. Since the criterion are fixed, in all but rare cases we could be aware much earlier.

What are the hours of operation?

The warming center will open at 7:00 P.M. Lights out is at 9:00 P.M., the guests are awakened at 6:00 A.M., and all are out of the building at 7:00 A.M. The BOHO staff completes cleaning up between 7:30 and 8:00 A.M.

Total numbers expected and space needed

This season has averaged 44 guests, with a maximum of 74. Our parish hall would readily accommodate these numbers. In the event of an emergency with larger numbers we might also use the chapel.

Do we expect children?

There have been no children or families so far this season. EFFT is the more normal agency for services to families. Note, however, that if there are children present, the St. Aidan's volunteers would all need to have the "Safeguarding God's Children" training and follow the appropriate policies.

What are the lines of communication?

Normal communications for other than immediate operating issues will be between the St. Aidan's program director and the BOHO Executive Director. However, when the center is open, immediate operating issues will be resolved between the St. Aidan's hosts and the BOHO staff, with the St. Aidan's program director notified as soon as possible.

What would this change in the relationship between St. Aidan's and the homeless population outside of the warming center hours?

St. Aidan's is a place of Christian hospitality, and all are welcome, and are especially invited to join us in worship. It is also true that this program is not intended to provide a day shelter. If daytime visits are made by large numbers of our guests, or if they expect to stay for long periods, we will have to reassess this policy.