

SEVERE WEATHER NETWORK LIVINGSTON COUNTY HOMELESS SHELTER PROGRAM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

SEVERE WEATHER NETWORK LIVINGSTON COUNTY HOMELESS SHELTER PROVIDES 5,032 EMERGENCY NIGHTS OF SHELTER. CELEBRATES GUEST SUCCESS STORIES. PLANS TO PIVOT BACK TO A CONGREGATE SHELTER FOR THE 2021/2022 WINTER SEASON.

The Severe Weather Network Livingston County, a 501 © (3) nonprofit organization providing emergency winter sheltering services to Livingston County homeless adult men and women completed their 5th sheltering season on April 30, 2021 providing 1,289 shelter nights to 31 adults ranging in ages from 19 to 72.

The Severe Weather Network Livingston County (SWN) has provided **5,032** shelter nights to homeless adult men and women of Livingston County, Michigan since 2017. Prior to 2017, Livingston County never had a congregate homeless shelter. Homeless adult men and women seeking emergency shelter could access a limited amount of government funded motel vouchers from local service agencies, mainly The Salvation Army and the Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency. Unfortunately, motel shelter funds would typically be depleted by the early fall season with no funding available for sheltering during the coldest months of the year. Initially, a grass roots effort, the Severe Weather Network was formed by caring, compassionate and empathetic individuals within the community who saw there was a great need for sheltering services. Through great collaborative efforts among social service agencies and churches, a rotational type of sheltering model was created where churches opened their doors and welcomed guests for overnight accommodations for 2 – 4 weeks at a time while other churches provided the 450+ trained volunteers necessary to staff the shelter and to provide meals and transportation. Initially, due to space limitations, churches were only able to offer facility space between the Advent and Lenten months, allowing for the sheltering program to operate from mid-January to late March.

In 2018, after receiving \$15,000 from various community donors, the Severe Weather Network Steering Committee unanimously voted to form the Severe Weather Network Livingston County, a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit organization. By creating a nonprofit organization, the Severe Weather Network was eligible to apply for and receive a small amount of grant funding allowing the organization to lease permanent sheltering space and to extend the winter sheltering season from December 1 through April 15. From 2018 through 2020, the Severe Weather Network operated from the Chilson Hills Baptist Church in Genoa Township.

Due to the Covid19 pandemic, the Severe Weather Network was required to pivot this past season from a congregate shelter setting to a motel shelter setting. Co-chair Diane Duncan shared, "Overall, this operational change to a motel shelter presented many great challenges to the organization. The SWN Board of Directors recognized immediately that sequestering guests in a motel room without immediate access to community volunteers, board members and social services etc. was not beneficial to our guests nor the community. For these reasons, we added intensive case management to our programming where each guest was required to meet with the staff case manager on a regular basis to create and implement a plan to secure employment and housing. This programming policy combined with the utilization of financial donations to cover initial rental housing costs, proved to be incredibly successful as nearly half of all guests secured employment and sustainable housing over a 5 month period of time. Based on our years of congregate sheltering experience, we recognize that guests thrive in a congregate shelter where each guest is embraced by loving community volunteers in an atmosphere of positivity. By adding the critical case management programming piece, we are confident future guests, too, will have greater opportunities for success."

The Severe Weather Network will begin the 2021/2022 season on November 1, one month earlier than in years passed. The Severe Weather Center will return to the Chilson Hills Baptist Church location offering a congregate shelter setting operated by staff, SWN Board members and community volunteers. Lisa Klein, Co-chair states, "We are grateful for this past season's meal team of chefs who prepared and delivered 1,160 packaged meals to our guests. We are excited to welcome back all of our 450 trained community volunteers for the 2021/2022 season. We have solely missed their fellowship and the experience of their overall compassion and caring ways."

The SWN Board of Directors is actively planning for the 2021/2022 season through various fundraising initiatives including an online Giving Grid in which donors can share pictures, words of encouragement and messages which will be printed and displayed at the Sever Weather Center next season. <https://www.givinggrid.com/severeweathernetwork/>. Please visit our website for updates on future fundraising events and operational timelines www.livingstonswn.org.

For questions please contact Diane Duncan, SWN Board Co-chairperson at livingstonswn@gmail.com/810-533-1475.