OCTOBER 31, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LIVINGSTON COUNTY’S ONLY ADULT SEASONAL HOMELESS SHELTER CLOSING PERMANENTLY

The Severe Weather Network Livingston County (SWN) Board of Directors unanimously

voted to cease operations and dissolve the nonprofit organization.  The Severe Weather Network, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, has provided emergency winter sheltering services to Livingston County homeless adult men and women since 2016 serving 218 guests, providing 6,500 nights of emergency shelter while saving local agencies receiving federal, state and local homeless emergency sheltering funding over $292,000.00.

Prior to 2016, Livingston County had no congregate homeless shelter.  Homeless adult men and women seeking emergency shelter had access to a limited amount of government funded motel vouchers from local service agencies, mainly The Salvation Army and the Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency.  Due to funding limitations and restrictions on the number of hotel nights per voucher, homeless individuals had no options during the coldest months of the year but to shelter in automobiles, on the streets or in tents.  Initially a grassroots 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.

Diane Duncan, Co-chair for the SWN Board of Directors shares, "This was a heart wrenching decision and one the SWN Board had hoped we could have avoided.  Operating the shelter during the pandemic significantly increased our costs due to the need for Covid test kits, air filtration systems, and staffing given the reduction in overall volunteerism during Covid.  Less than a quarter of our 450 member volunteer base committed to volunteering the past two years.  While we did our best over the past six months to inform the community of our challenges, hoping to engage their support for the upcoming 2022/2023 winter season, we simply do not have the funding or volunteer commitments necessary to operate the Severe Weather Center.”

“The biggest concern for the SWN Board is knowing that without a permanent congregate shelter in Livingston County, our homeless adults will, once again, only be allotted a certain number of emergency nights of shelter in a local motel. Due to the solitary nature of motel sheltering, individuals lack having access to an advocate that will help them to determine and set goals to overcome their barriers. The housing and rental assistance program is very complicated.  Individuals need help connecting to the community resources that are available.  Many individuals do not have the tools, knowledge or mental capacity to navigate the system.  Case management is KEY to ensuring that a homeless adult has the opportunity for a positive outcome in the transition to sustainable living.  Financial assistance and case management were two critical services the SWN offered to each guest.  It was through these services we were able to support and assist our guests during their most desperate times helping them to transition into a more sustainable setting. Sheltering homeless adults in a motel room is a band aid and does not resolve the problem, which will be further exacerbated when the motel voucher supply is exhausted and people are forced back onto our streets.”

It is the hope and prayer of the SWN Board that Livingston County residents and officials will not only recognize the fact that on any given day nearly 132 people face homelessness in our county but they will also embrace and advocate for a permanent year round shelter. While homelessness may look different here than in large cities, it is most definitely in our own backyard and we should not ignore it.  No one wakes up to say how thankful they are to be homeless.  However, guests of the SWN shared on a daily basis how thankful they were for the Severe Weather Center and the services provided by the staff, volunteers and board members.

She concludes, “To the 450 volunteers, our community churches and businesses, collaborating agencies and staff members, thank you for your support.  We are eternally grateful for your efforts in providing donations, meals, laundry services and most importantly your fellowship.  You have cared so deeply and compassionately for your brothers and sisters. It has been an honor and joy to serve the least of our brethren with you.”

The SWN will be distributing any remaining funds and assets to local agencies that directly serve the needs of homeless adults.

Anyone seeking emergency shelter should dial "211" for assistance.