

# ‘The sky is the limit.’ Out of the Cold: Centre County opens day shelter for area homeless

BY MARLEY PARISH  
MARCH 01, 2020 5:00 AM STATE COLLEGE



Out of the Cold Centre County has moved their daytime shelter to the Meeting House on Atherton Street, offering more stability and features for their guests. BY ABBY DREY

Homelessness comes with a number of instabilities, but Out of the Cold: Centre County’s new day shelter aims to provide guests with a consistent space to rest and access resources — amenities that were unavailable at makeshift shelters.

Located on the first floor of the Meetinghouse on Atherton — 318 S. Atherton St. —the shelter is open Monday-Friday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. and provides guests with space to sleep, eat, store belongings and utilize online resources. OOTC3 Program Manager Sarah Potter and Support Coordinator Tamboura Colbert said the space, which opened Feb. 17, has seen about 10 guests per day.

“We find that people that are in this situation, as far as being homeless, each transition is a challenge,” Colbert said. “This is going to take a little time for them and, as we continue to build and work on our relationships with them, the numbers will grow.”

OOTC3 was established in February 2011 by the Community Safety Net. From mid-October to early May, it serves as an emergency shelter from 9 p.m.-7 a.m. every night. During the 2019-20 season, 14 congregations helped provide overnight shelter for 118 guests — filling 2,473 cots and serving almost 5,000 meals.

But the day shelter will be open year-round. Colbert said the shelter has been in the works for quite some time and was a longtime goal of former program manager Beckie Romig, who died in September.

Before the move, OOTC3 relied on local churches to provide guests with space to come during the day, rest, socialize, shower and eat, but due to services and church programming, shelter hours were limited. The Atherton location has allowed OOTC3 to provide guests with even more resources without having to relocate to different venues throughout the week.

“I’d say our guests rest. They eat. Last week, we had several people applying for jobs,” Potter said. “We help with transportation. Tam drove one of our guests who is now out of our program today. It’s always bittersweet because we’re sad to see them go, but he found a permanent place to stay.”

Local businesses and restaurants have partnered with OOTC3 and donate meals for guests to eat when they come to the shelter. OOTC still maintains its relationship with area congregations to provide weekly meals and a space for guests to bathe three days a week, but in the future, Potter hopes to install a shower facility at the day shelter.

The new shelter also allows access to a private room, so guests and staff can discuss confidential or personal matters. Guests are also permitted access to computers and a printer to apply for jobs or pay bills. The equipment was installed by Melissa Scott, Director of the Bellefonte-based Community Services IT Initiative — a startup project that assists underserved populations in accessing technology and teaching computer literacy.

“Especially with homeless populations, they tend to stay in a small area,” Scott said. “They don’t like to move outside of their general area, and so you’re asking them to move outside of their comfort zone ... and on top of that, you’re asking them to go into a public space like a library. You’ve already put so many steps between them that it becomes frustrating, and they’ll walk away from it.”

Currently, the day shelter has about 20 consistent volunteers who supervise the space throughout the day, but OOTC3 hopes to recruit even more as the shelter works to expand its hours into the evening and on Saturdays.

“The sky is the limit,” Colbert said. “We’re just looking forward to what can and will happen.”

If you are interested in donating to or volunteering with OOTC3, email [ootccentreco@gmail.com](mailto:ootccentreco@gmail.com).