SEVERE WEATHER NETWORK LIVINGSTON COUNTY HOMELESS SHELTER PROGRAM

SEPTEMBER 4, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

LIVINGSTON COUNTY’S ONLY ADULT SEASONAL HOMELESS SHELTER WILL CEASE OPERATIONS THIS UPCOMING WINTER SEASON IF FUNDING IS NOT SECURED BY OCTOBER 31

The Severe Weather Network Livingston County (SWN) Board of Directors has unanimously voted to cease this winter’s operations of its seasonal homeless shelter unless substantial additional financial and volunteer commitments are confirmed by October 31, 2022.  The Severe Weather Network, a 501 © (3) nonprofit organization, has provided emergency winter sheltering services to Livingston County homeless adult men and women since 2016.  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-chairperson explains, “This is an urgent plea and our final request for financial commitments. Our organization serves approximately 60 homeless individuals each winter season. This number is expected to increase due to rental evictions and cost of living increases. We as a Board had significant and unique challenges the past two years while operating during the pandemic.  In addition to our normal operating budget, we were forced to take costly measures to ensure the health and safety of our guests and volunteers which resulted in zero transmission of Covid allowing the center to remain fully operational.  Unfortunately, the pandemic deterred the majority of our 450 volunteer team members from engaging with us which resulted in the need to hire paid overnight security and a team of part-time coordinators to help stabilize the operation, resulting in higher than expected operational costs.  Given the lack of volunteers, The SWN Board of Directors has been “hands on” for the past two years volunteering hundreds of hours to the operation while also managing our own full time jobs.  While we are incredibly proud of the work we have accomplished, we know we are personally not able to sustain these numbers of volunteer hours for another season.  Without a volunteer base, we must hire a competent and dedicated team to operate the Severe Weather Center. The current monthly operating budget with a paid team is $34,000.  In order for the Severe Weather Center to be fully operational this upcoming winter season, the Board needs to secure a minimum of $200K by October 31.

The Severe Weather Network has provided more than 6,500 nights of emergency shelter and is a much needed community resource in Livingston County. The organization, through case management efforts, connects guests to resources for housing, employment, mental health, and medical health.  Financial contributions are utilized for facility rental space, meals, transportation, staff, overnight security, and Covid safety measures.  One of the key goals of the organization is to aid guests in finding permanent solutions to end their homelessness. To this end, financial assistance is also used for guest assistance including down payments for rental leases, rental insurance, fuel, automotive repairs, and automotive insurance.

Ongoing fundraising and community volunteer recruitment efforts will continue through October 31.  The organization is seeking to secure business sponsorships, engage county churches in mission work and expand community volunteer opportunities.  The annual Trivia Night fundraising event is scheduled for October 15.

 If interested in sharing your time, talent or treasure, please email Livingstonswn@gmail.org or visit our website at www.livingstonswn.org.