



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Overnight Warming Centre on the Horizon

With cold weather beginning to descend on the Rainy River District, members of the Fort Frances Homeless Committee have been working diligently to secure another temporary centre for this winter to allow individuals experiencing homelessness a warm, safe place to be overnight. The Fort Frances Homeless Committee is the group responsible for opening an Out of the Cold centre during last year's coldest months. It is a collective of front-line workers from non-profit agencies spanning social, legal, housing, health, cultural, employment and youth services.

This group's focus is to seek both long-term and short-term solutions to homelessness in the district. They identified the lack of emergency shelter as a high priority concern for Fort Frances in 2017 and have been working since to advocate for more affordable housing. They have also been looking for funding and partnership opportunities to lobby locally for supportive/transitional housing for individuals with complex needs and the hard-to-house. Such a model would include crisis beds for individuals experiencing acute homelessness.

Realizing that this goal would be a long-term one, the group decided to attempt to use existing buildings and partnerships to bring an Out of the Cold model to Fort Frances. This model typically utilizes donated spaces and agency partnerships to operate a moving "pop-up" shelter throughout the cold months. Being unable to secure donated space or meet municipal zoning regulations to allow individuals to sleep, the group shifted gears last winter to an overnight warming centre in a rented space, which was staffed temporarily by qualified support workers through the Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board.

The Homeless Committee fundraised to operate this centre through an overnight sleepout event on Scott Street, and received a number of individual and corporate donations, as well as funds from non-profit agencies. Because of the temporary nature of this program and its reliance on community partnership, the committee came back to the drawing board this summer to begin planning for the 2019 cold season.

The warming centre operated out of the Volunteer Bureau last winter. With that space now occupied by the Fort Frances Family Centre, a separate entity, the Homeless Committee is looking to set up in a new space. No new location has been secured, though they are exploring all potential options with some discussions currently taking place.

The group's goal is to open for four months beginning in mid-late November. With some funds in reserve from last year's donations, the group is seeking donations for this year, which can be made through Community Living Fort Frances & District and are eligible for tax receipts.

To be kept informed of updates, please visit "Out of the Cold Fort Frances" on Facebook.

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Thank you for providing the opportunity to address the issue of homelessness in Fort Frances. For information on the Out of the Cold Warming Centre, please contact Sandra Weir at sandraw@rrdssab.on.ca or 807-274-5349 x 230.