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Frigid winter triggers call for shelters

By Sarah Sobanski

Concerns are being raised for North Hastings's most vulnerable residents as the second half of winter 2017-'18 holds nothing back.

It felt like -40 degrees with the wind chill Jan. 5 and 6 in Bancroft and across the province. A day later the area was hit with almost a half a foot of snow.

St. Paul's United Church Rev. Lynn Watson tells *Bancroft This Week* she received a call from someone who had nowhere to go Dec. 28, another frigid day.

?There's nothing in place in town? Those who serve the at-risk members of our community, we haven't come together and asked what happens at night when someone doesn't have a warm, safe place to go,? said Watson.

Watson helped host a warming centre at St. Paul's on those early January days. From 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., people could attend the church to get out of the cold and grab a warm bite to eat.

?We thought even during the daytime ? you know, their houses with cost of oil, and everything else, and hydro ? people are trying not to heat their houses during the day and need to get out of them,? said Watson. ?It's just a place that people can come in and get out of the cold.?

Watson said she hoped the station would start the conversation of the area needing space for people to go ?even for a couple of days.? The church didn't have the resources to stay open overnight. That's when, Watson said, those without somewhere to stay are at the highest risk.

Director of **community and human services for the county** Erin Rivers says though there aren't any shelters in the county, there are numbers people can call if they're facing a shelter crisis. One such number is for the Hastings County Community and Human Services Intake Access Centre: 1-866-414-0300.

?You don't need to be on assistance to call this number,? said Rivers. ?I could be having a crisis today, and I don't know where to call. Call this number.?

The **Canadian Mental Health Association** also mans the county's after hours shelter crisis number, which the intake access centre number redirects to after regular business hours. The After-hours Homeless Emergency Services Program for Hastings County number is 1-877-528-9514.

?You get to talk to a live person to explain your situation and how we may be of assistance during your crisis period until we can reopen in the morning,? said Rivers, explaining the after-hours number also covers holidays. ?The [CMHA] will foster a solution for you.?

Rivers said solutions can vary from helping someone in crisis find somewhere warm to stay for the night or helping him or her find transportation to where he or she intends to stay.

?We're a busy 401-corridor here. A lot of people get stuck here and so it's just a matter of helping them get on their way,? said Rivers.

These numbers allow social services to connect with those in need whether it be long- or short-term, Rivers suggested. It's important that those in need know of these numbers, and that the services know of those in need so they can help.

?People don't call, so I don't know that they need help,? said Rivers, hoping people would read *This Week* and remember the county's services numbers.

Watson expressed a need to get the word out for the warming centre as well. While many volunteers came out to help at the centre, none came to ?just get warm,? said Watson.

Both Rivers and Watson agreed this is a good news story ? perhaps all those in need had found shelter from the extreme cold.

All things considered however, Watson still planned to open the church again should another cold front be seen on the horizon.

?We're all cold. I go out I'm going to be just as cold as the next person. If we can just come together and have a good bite to eat and some good conversation and then somehow we get ourselves together through this winter,? she said.

?Most people who are homeless have friends that they can couch surf with but we also have a housing crisis? What is available is not affordable and that's not getting better because people aren't building rental units? As a community we need to come up with a plan [for when this happens again].?