

# Warming Centers

## *County Action Needed Now*

### **SUMMARY**

Extreme cold weather poses a significant threat to Sonoma County's unhoused population. And we can expect that the County will continue to experience episodes of near-freezing and sub-freezing temperatures during the winter months, often accompanied by wind, rain, flooding, and snow or hail.

According to Sonoma County Public Health Department staff, this reality poses significant health risks for people who remain unhoused. Not only is hypothermia a risk for healthy individuals, it may also exacerbate medical and mental health illnesses suffered by many who are unhoused.

Therefore, there is a clear need for warm shelter from the winter cold to relieve the suffering of the unhoused, some of Sonoma County's most vulnerable citizens.

In April 2022 the Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) received a complaint that was co-authored by two citizens. Their complaint focused on the winter of 2021-2022 when Sonoma County experienced two episodes of severe cold, the first in late December 2021, and the second in late February 2022. It should also be noted that this occurred in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. The complaint alleged the following:

- The 2020 Sonoma County Homeless Census and Survey (Point-in-Time) indicated that in Sonoma County there were approximately 2000 unhoused individuals. The number of warming centers and spaces was not enough to accommodate the need.
- There was a lack of advance planning and coordination between County elected officials, County agencies, cities, and faith-based non-governmental providers. (Note that all references to "County" in this report are to the "County of Sonoma.")
- The designated telephone of the Coordinated Entry System was left unattended at times during the December 2021 cold event.
- There was concern that individuals seeking shelter from the cold were turned away.
- The Board of Supervisors and several departments and agencies within the County were described as unresponsive to these complaints.
- There was no information available regarding the number of individuals contacted, spaces available in the warming centers, or number of spaces occupied.

The Grand Jury chose to investigate this complaint. The Grand Jury was able to establish the following:

- Officials from the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, Sonoma County Department of Health Services, Sonoma County Community Development Commission, and Sonoma County Department of Emergency Services were interviewed, and the Grand Jury was

advised by each official that there was not a policy in place for opening warming centers during that time.

- We did not find that responsibility for protecting the unhoused during cold weather emergencies is defined, documented, and clearly understood. This was determined after interviewing people throughout the County government, from the Board of Supervisors to other departments and agencies within the County.
- There was a lack of advance planning by the County. There are no Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between Sonoma County and any city in the county that describes a coordinated effort to fund and support the opening of warming centers.
- The actual number of warming center spaces available was variable. Volunteer groups provided tents with space heaters as warming shelters. Catholic Charities provided space at the Homeless Services Center. There were additional spaces available at congregate temporary shelters. There were expanded single housing options at motels.
- Even though the number of spaces available was less than the perceived need, there was no evidence that people in need of shelter were turned away due to lack of availability.
- A spike in COVID-19 compounded the problem during this period. Public health protocols also discouraged individuals from gathering in large congregate settings such as indoor shelters.
- The data that were available demonstrated that warming centers were not used to capacity.
- Despite the lack of formal policies, individuals at the County did lend support to some cities and non-profit organizations. They assisted in identifying space availability and locations. County workers also put out regular notices with warming center locations and hours. The cities and the warming centers were given guidance regarding COVID-19 protocols to keep the staff and the unhoused persons as safe as possible.
- The City of Santa Rosa, to its credit, adopted a policy in March 2022, shortly after the last cold spell in February 2022.
- The County had no policy for opening warming centers at the time of the cold weather emergencies in December 2021 and February 2022.
- As of the winter of 2022-2023, the County still has no policy.

In this report we focus on the County's response to extreme cold weather emergencies because the County plays a critical role in ensuring the health and safety of all County residents whether they live in cities or in unincorporated areas. Even within cities that have tried to respond to these emergencies on their own, the County has an important role in coordinating the various governmental and non-profit agency actions and responsibilities. The recent adoption of a policy by some cities regarding warming centers does not relieve the County of its responsibility. Although this report will describe some actions taken by various cities, the failure to provide warming centers for unhoused people is a County problem. Several of the people the

Grand Jury interviewed stated they believe the County should step up and assist in opening warming centers throughout the County.

## GLOSSARY

- **AAR:** After-Action Report is a retrospective analysis that answers these four questions:
  - What was expected to occur
  - What really happened
  - What went wrong—why it went wrong
  - What went well—why this went well
- **CAO:** County Administrative Officer
- **CDC:** Community Development Commission, a Sonoma County agency that “exists to open doors to permanent housing and opportunity.”
- **Congregate:** A place where many people reside, meet, or gather in close proximity.
- **COC:** Continuum of Care “is Sonoma County’s collaborative effort representing the homeless services system of care.”
- **Coordinated Entry System:** Referral and housing placement system.
- **Functional Zero:** That point when a community prevents homelessness whenever possible and ensure that when homelessness does occur, it is rare, brief, and temporary.
- **Hypothermia:** Dangerously low body temperature.
- **MOU:** Memorandum of Understanding, a written agreement between a public agency and another party.
- **Point in Time Survey:** A count on a single night of the people in a community who are experiencing homelessness that includes both sheltered and unsheltered populations.
- **Shelter Hesitant or Resistant:** Unhoused people who are reluctant to use temporary shelters.
- **Unhoused or Unsheltered:** Lacking stable, safe, and adequate housing.
- **Warming Center:** A short-term emergency shelter that operates when temperatures or a combination of rain or snow, wind chill, and temperature become dangerous. Their main purpose is the prevention of death and injury from exposure to the elements.
- **WCCC:** West County Community Services.

## BACKGROUND

This investigation was undertaken in response to a citizen complaint. The complaint alleged that the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, several County departments, and several jurisdictions, failed to respond adequately to protect unhoused people during an extreme cold weather emergency in the winter of 2021-2022. The complaint was received by the Grand Jury in April 2022 and reviewed by the entire Grand Jury. After careful review, the Grand Jury decided that an investigation was warranted, based on the seriousness of the allegations.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The 2022-2023 Grand Jury conducted 14 interviews with individuals who are involved with providing services to unhoused people in Sonoma County. We contacted an additional eight individuals by email. These people include:

- Elected and appointed County and city officials
- Staff at non-profit agencies
- Advocates for unhoused people
- Formerly unhoused people

The Grand Jury also reviewed and evaluated documents from a wide range of sources addressing services for unhoused people, weather emergency guidelines, and funding availability for warming centers. These included documents from the County, cities that responded to our request for information and other government and non-governmental entities. The most important of these are listed in the bibliography. The Grand Jury visited warming centers to view their facilities, staffing levels, and amenities.

## **DISCUSSION**

During interviews, more than one person asked this question: If the County can provide a shelter at the fairgrounds with cots, food, etc. during a disaster, like a flood, fire, or earthquake, why can't it provide the same shelter for unhoused individuals and families who are at risk during a severe cold weather emergency? Given that common sense tells us that each winter we are highly likely to experience several episodes of severe cold weather, the question above is one that requires an answer. This report provides the reader with an answer to this question.

This report will examine:

- What is a warming center?
- What are the health risks to individuals who are exposed to a prolonged episode of excessive cold temperature?
- How many individuals need shelter during cold weather events?
- What is the actual warming center usage by unhoused individuals?
- Why are warming centers so difficult to establish?

### **What is a Warming Center?**

Warming centers are meant to be a short-term solution to a temporary problem that arises when the County of Sonoma experiences a severe cold spell, that may or may not be accompanied by rain, wind, hail, or snow. The cold weather events usually occur between late fall and early spring each year. These cold weather spells typically last from two days to a week. They may last longer if the rain and cold persist.

Warming centers traditionally consist of a building with heat and restrooms. They usually operate in the evening and through the night. Hours are typically 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. Many centers

do not provide food, or cots for sleeping, but some do. Most of the smaller centers are supervised by volunteers and others have paid supervision. All have established rules of behavior to ensure the safety and security of those who use the centers.

It should be noted that during the winter of 2021-2022, COVID-19 regulations were in place for congregate shelters/centers that required masking, testing, and distancing between individuals. These restrictions further limited the occupancy of any center. In response to these restrictions, one non-profit agency put up tents with space heaters in a local park in Santa Rosa. Many non-profits provided unhoused individuals with tents, sleeping bags and warm clothing to help them survive the extreme cold.

### **What Are the Health Risks?**

Sonoma County Public Health Department staff stated that hypothermia is a real risk to the health of individuals who remain unsheltered in the face of freezing or near-freezing temperatures. The longer an individual is unsheltered in the cold, the greater the risk for hypothermia, serious health problems, and death. The degree of cold that triggers the establishment of warming centers is a matter of judgement, and not pure science. The Grand Jury reviewed other county and city policies to determine what criteria were used to open warming centers. Each jurisdiction had a different temperature and a different set of conditions that triggered the setting up of centers. We asked: why was 32 degrees, and not 38 degrees, or 40 degrees chosen as the target temperature to trigger opening of warming centers? All the individuals we interviewed as to how a decision was made to determine the temperature and conditions required to trigger a call to open centers, stated that it was based on an extensive “group discussion.” In the City of Santa Rosa, 32 degrees was decided as the target temperature. Sonoma County has no policy regarding the temperature at which a cold weather emergency should be declared. During our interviews with County agency and department heads, the Grand Jury found no consensus on whose job it is to declare a cold weather emergency. There is a cost for opening and closing a warming center. The lower the trigger temperature means there are less times the centers are open, and therefore, less cost. When confronted with this argument, one official stated that cost is always part of the discussion, but not the only factor.

### **How Many People Need Temporary Warming Centers?**

The countywide “Point in Time” survey estimates the number of unhoused individuals at roughly 3000. The City of Santa Rosa has, by far, the greatest number of unhoused individuals and families. That number hovers around 1900. The number of warming center spaces in Santa Rosa is flexible and primarily located at Catholic Charities Caritas Center. The warming center at Caritas was open for three days last winter: 12/30/2022, 12/31/2022, and 1/1/2023. They stated that they averaged 33 individuals per night. Sam Jones Hall, a temporary shelter run by Catholic Charities, also expanded their capacity during the cold spell. In addition, there are other non-profit organizations that provided limited warming center spaces as well.

The number of warming center spaces doesn’t meet the perceived need of all unhoused people, but the available spaces appear to meet the actual demand by unhoused people who use them.

## **Why Do Some People Not Use the Warming Centers?**

The Grand Jury interviewed numerous individuals who have direct contact with unhoused people. There are several reasons why some of the unhoused people choose not to use warming centers. The most obvious reasons for not seeking shelter are pets are not accepted; there is no place to put belongings; feeling unsafe in groups; lack of transportation to the warming centers; difficulty in locating warming centers, and inability to stay with partners. Many of the non-profit entities are actively trying to remove these barriers.

## **Why are Warming Centers so Hard to Establish?**

This was a question implied in the complaint. The answers are many, such as lack of advance planning; policies and procedures; facilities; funding; and staffing. The answer may also be attributed to the highest priority that the County gives to the Functional Zero program, resulting in lower priority being given to more immediate emergency sheltering for the unhoused during cold weather emergencies.

### **Lack of Advance Planning**

Regarding planning for winter warming centers, the Grand Jury interviewed County department heads and a member of the County Board of Supervisors. We asked each person if they were aware of any preplanning measures in place for winter warming centers and each responded that there was no preplanning. We asked if there were any MOUs between the cities and the County that would reflect some form of mutual aid in the opening of winter warming centers throughout the County. The answer, once again was no. To confirm the lack of planning on the County's part, we asked a city councilperson, city manager, and city staff if they were aware of coordination and planning with the County to assist in the opening of winter warming centers. They were not aware of any. The same questions were asked of the manager of a warming center, and that individual was also unaware of any coordination and planning.

It must be noted that the City of Santa Rosa, following the winter of 2021-2022, developed an [Extreme Weather Warming Center Policy](#) in March 2022. They have already implemented their plan this winter. We are unable to assess the effectiveness of their plan due to our publishing schedule. We contacted the cities in Sonoma County to see if they had preplanned for winter warming centers as did the City of Santa Rosa, and those that responded reported no preplanning. This is not to say that no planning at all was done; Healdsburg signed an agreement with Reach for Home, a nonprofit serving unhoused people, however, not until November 2022. The planning for winter warming centers seems to occur at the last possible moment, that is two days to a week before the first extreme cold episode.

The City of Sebastopol did exactly that. A few days before freezing weather was predicted this last December, staff, with the help of volunteer groups and a very supportive community, opened a winter warming center for five days. The Grand Jury reviewed the City of Sebastopol after-action report (AAR) and recommends that the reader carefully review that document (see Exhibit 1). The contents reveal the difficulties and challenges that had to be overcome in a short period of time, and recommends preplanning be done in the summer months to mitigate many of these problems.

Preplanning can solve a plethora of problems. Finding and preparing facilities to host the winter warming centers is critical and should be done in the summer months. A building that has space to accommodate large groups of people, heat, restrooms, and can accommodate peoples' belongings, and possibly pets, are in relatively short supply. The location of the buildings is important for accessibility. Once a building has been identified, it is also important that public officials address the neighbors' concerns about the location. Identifying the sites and securing them for the winter is critical to any successful plan.

### **Staffing Challenges**

Who does the work of winter warming centers? As one city official stated: "We are funders, not doers." Warming centers are not staffed by any government agency. Winter warming centers are staffed by volunteers and paid staff of private, not-for-profit organizations. These organizations find the facilities, hire the staff, and do much of the planning to run the warming centers. Funding is always a major concern for these organizations as they generally operate under a very limited budget. Some cities in Sonoma County provided limited funds last winter for warming shelters.

Staffing for supervision and security during the times the winter warming centers are open is a significant challenge. Cold spells can happen over the holiday season. Finding staff willing to work or volunteer during that time can be challenging. Vetting and training staff and volunteers takes time and planning. It is best done well in advance of winter.

### **Funding Challenges**

There are many challenges in attempting to open a warming center, including finding a facility, securing trained staff, and notifying the unhoused community. Underlying these challenges is a lack of dedicated funding specific to winter warming centers. The current funding available to assist unhoused people is primarily directed at finding and securing permanent housing. The Continuum of Care (CoC) Board of Directors is comprised of elected officials from the County and cities, members of non-profit organizations assisting unhoused people, and individuals with expertise in assisting unhoused people. The Grand Jury interviewed five members of the CoC and established that their funds are not available to be used to support winter warming centers.

One of the bigger fiscal hurdles for smaller non-profits is overcoming the way government pays private entities for services. The smaller private entities must advance money to pay for facilities, staff, and expenses, and then file a claim to the government (city or County) for reimbursement. The lack of robust financial resources for some small non-profits and the time lag for reimbursement from cities or the County, makes it difficult for some small organizations to work with local government.

### **Lack of Data to Support Planning**

For the Board of Supervisors to fund warming centers they need data. The Grand Jury made several requests for data from the Community Development Commission (CDC) regarding attendance at warming centers. The CDC did not consistently collect that data, and did not provide it to the Grand Jury. In contrast, the City Council of Sebastopol, which opened a warming center this past December 2022, received an extensive after-action report detailing

not only the attendance at the center each day, but a detailed description of the all the efforts by volunteers and others to start it up and keep it open for five days. The report highlighted the struggles in finding and staffing a facility and the efforts required to notify unhoused people regarding the location and availability of the warming center. It also pointed out areas of improvement, specifically, how the lack of preplanning complicated their efforts. It would be very helpful for all warming centers to provide the County Board of Supervisors with after-action reports in the spring. This would enable them to determine any actions needed to support and coordinate resources more effectively for the next winter.

### **A County Problem**

In summary, providing warming centers for the unhoused during freezing or near-freezing temperatures is not just a city problem, but a County government problem as well. The lack of any County plan results in little coordination of services and accountability. Several of the people the Grand Jury interviewed stated they believe the County should step up and assist in opening warming centers throughout the County.

### **CONCLUSION**

Because of the real health risks that unhoused people in Sonoma County face during severe cold weather, it is essential that protecting them be a high priority for the County. Key to this protection is the existence of warming centers needed to get people out of the cold.

Providing that protection is a complex challenge because warming centers that are easy to get to must be identified as well as secured with necessary agreements, staffing, and funding. Also, communication with unhoused people must be done effectively so that they know where to go, how to get there, and what rules there are for accommodations. Additionally, it must be made clear to everyone involved *when* this kind of cold weather emergency exists so that protecting unhoused people can be achieved.

Adding to that complexity is the reality that many unhoused people are hesitant to take advantage of the warming centers, so they must be protected in other ways, such as with blankets, tents, and sleeping bags.

Because of the complexity of the solutions involved in protecting unhoused people during these weather emergencies, clear policies and protocols need to be in place. Careful advance planning is essential to avoid deficiencies in the response due to last-minute mobilization, poor coordination, and inadequate communication. These policies must leave no doubt as to who is responsible for each part of the response, and how the various agencies and departments must coordinate with each other.

The major theme of the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations involve the development of policies and protocols that address the critical need for temporary shelter in extreme weather, initiated and overseen by the County Board of Supervisors, with direct participation of County-level departments and jurisdictions within the County.



## FINDINGS

The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury determined that:

- F1. The County failed in its critical role in protecting the health and safety of all unhoused people during severe cold weather emergencies during the winters of 2021-2022 and 2022-2023.
- F2. Inadequate coordination between the various involved County agencies led to an inefficient and less effective response to cold weather emergencies that negatively affected the health and safety of unhoused people.
- F3. At the time of this complaint (April 2022) and through the time of this report, the County failed to create formal policies and procedures to protect unhoused people during cold weather emergencies.
- F4. Failure by the County, including the Board of Supervisors to plan and prepare in advance for warming centers during extreme weather emergencies, results in inefficient last-minute responses, leaving unhoused individuals exposed to severe cold.
- F5. A lack of clear definition and understanding of the responsibilities of various County departments regarding the cold weather protection of unhoused people increases their health risks.
- F6. A lack of identification of, and agreements with, warming facilities in advance of cold weather emergencies leads to a deficit of easily accessible spaces when those emergencies occur.
- F7. Poor and inconsistent communication with unhoused people results in individuals needlessly remaining unsheltered during cold weather emergencies.
- F8. Providing temporary shelter for unhoused people during weather emergencies does not receive the priority from the County to enable appropriate funding for staff, supplies, transportation, and other expenditures to meet this critical need.
- F9. At the time of the complaint and through the winter of 2022-2023, the County did not have a plan or strategy to overcome shelter resistance which resulted in many unhoused people remaining exposed to the elements during weather emergencies.
- F10. By not protecting unhoused people during cold weather emergencies, the County has failed to adhere to its own Department of Health Services' mission statement to "promote, protect, and ensure access to services to support the health, recovery, and well-being of all in Sonoma County."
- F11. At the time of the complaint and through the winter of 2022-2023 the County failed to assign responsibility to an agency or individual to declare that a cold weather emergency existed.
- F12. At the time of the complaint and through the winter of 2022-2023, the County failed to consistently determine when the temperature and other weather conditions constituted a cold weather emergency.

F13. The County failed to consistently collect and utilize data such as costs, staffing, facilities, and the number of unhoused individuals who took advantage of the limited number of warming centers in the County, which hinders the ability to plan for future cold weather emergencies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury recommends that:

- R1. By September 30, 2023, the Board of Supervisors will develop and implement formal policies and procedures for protecting unhoused people in the County of Sonoma during cold weather emergencies. (F1 through F13)
- R2. By September 30, 2023, the Board of Supervisors defines the parameters to be used to declare a cold weather emergency in the County, including assignment of responsibilities for declaring and communicating a cold weather emergency to the responsible departments. (F3, F11, F12)
- R3. By September 30, 2023, the Board of Supervisors designates the County employee (as defined by the policy recommended in R1) who has the authority to declare a cold weather emergency that would initiate the opening of warming centers. (F1, F5, F11)
- R4. In order for the Board of Supervisors to make informed decisions regarding the need for warming centers, by September 30, 2023, the Board will direct staff (as defined by the policy recommended in R1) to collect data, including but not limited to: the number of individuals accessing warming centers throughout the county; the cost per day of operating warming centers throughout the county; the number of individuals denied access to warming centers because of a lack of capacity; the number of unhoused individuals who died from exposure to severe cold. (F3, F4, F8)
- R5. Beginning April 1, 2024, and every year thereafter on or about April 1, the Board of Supervisors will direct the County Administrative Officer (CAO) to present an after-action report to the Board regarding the effectiveness of County staff in supporting warming centers during episodes of severe cold over the previous winter. Using data identified in R4, collected over the past winter, the CAO will identify both successful efforts to support warming centers and areas that need improvement. (F3, F4, F8)
- R6. By December 31, 2023, the Board of Supervisors will direct staff to identify facilities within the unincorporated areas of the County that can be used as warming centers, and sign MOUs with the management of such facilities as necessary. (F4, F6)
- R7. By September 30, 2023, the Board of Supervisors will direct the responsible department (as defined in the policy recommended in R1) to identify County facilities, including unused or underutilized facilities, that will be available to be used as warming centers for unhoused people in extreme cold weather. (F6)
- R8. By September 30, 2023, the Board of Supervisors, in accordance with its adopted policy, will provide sufficient funding to support opening and maintaining warming centers during episodes of extreme cold weather emergencies. (F6, F8)

## REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code §§ 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses as follows:

- Sonoma County Board of Supervisors (R1 through R8)

The governing bodies indicated above should be aware that their comments and responses must be conducted subject to the notice, agenda, and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

## INVITED RESPONSES

The Grand Jury invites the following to respond:

- Department of Public Infrastructure (R6, R7)
- Department of Health Services (R1, R2)
- Department of Emergency Management (R2)

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## **EXHIBIT 1**

### **Warming Center After-Action Report from the City of Sebastopol**

TO: Mayor Neysa Hinton and Sebastopol City Councilmembers

FROM: Vice Mayor Diana Rich as Liaison to Homeless Service Providers

DATE: December 21, 2022

CC: Supervisor Lynda Hopkins; Dave Kiff of Community Development Commission

RE: Warming Center - Sebastopol - Wed Dec 14 through Sun Dec 18, 2022

To Mayor Hinton and Councilmembers: Please accept the following report, submitted to you in my role as Council-appointed Liaison to Homeless Service Providers. It provides details regarding the recent Warming Center offered in Sebastopol from Wednesday December 14 through Sunday night December 18. Thank you.

Diana Rich, Vice Mayor, and Liaison to Homeless Service Providers

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Sebastopol is a small town with a big heart. We have limited City-owned property, limited staff, and a budget that reflects the financial impacts of limited revenue sources made even worse by the pandemic. I have lived in this town for over twenty years; I was executive director of the Community Center for seven years, and am now half-way through my four-year term on the City Council. I have always been impressed by how much we do with our limited resources, to serve all members of our population of ~7600 as best we can. This includes the unhoused in our community.

The trigger for the December 2022 Warming Center effort was a temperature that dipped to below freezing on Tuesday night December 13, 2022. The projections were for continuing similar levels of cold temperatures through Sunday night December 18, 2022. It was apparent to me that there was a need to address the situation, and try to provide a warm place for locals needing a place to recover from the cold. I reached out to our various homeless service providers, to City Manager Larry McLaughlin and Assistant City Manager Mary Gourley, as well as Sonoma County Supervisor Lynda Hopkins, and we coordinated an effort to bring together local resources to open and operate a Warming Center through Sunday December 18th.

To be clear, Sebastopol does not have a city-owned facility we can "deploy" as a Warming and/or Cooling center. We do not have staff pre-assigned to operate and coordinate a Warming and/or Cooling center. We do not have agreements for use of a facility for a Warming and/or Cooling center, or for staffing to oversee, manage, and operate a Warming or Cooling center. We do not even have sufficient staff or resources to have developed a protocol or policy that addresses the when, how, and who of deploying a Warming and/or Cooling center.

What Sebastopol does have is all those qualities that make us a "small town with a big heart:" willing volunteers, dedicated nonprofits, and a can-do attitude from the community, City staff, and others who are focused on finding a way to do what's right. Our "stakeholder" group is broad and committed to getting things done.

This commitment by our community has shown results in the past. Last Winter we saw spontaneous action by a group of local volunteers, who partnered with the Community Church of Sebastopol to operate a Warming Center for a short time when the temperature was dipping. More recently, in the Summer of 2022, the City of Sebastopol coordinated a Cooling Center effort with various local facilities, including the Senior Center, the Sebastopol Community Cultural Center, and the Sebastopol Library, to confirm their publicly available spaces were available as Cooling Centers to those who might need a cool place to recover from the heat. Access was during regular daytime open hours for these facilities. No additional supervision or staff was needed, and no food or beverages or other materials or services were required for this effort.

In this instance, when the need for a Warming Center arose, the challenges and need were greater and much more complicated to meet. But once again Sebastopol's strong community-oriented qualities produced results. Despite the limitations that made the task seem insurmountable, we managed over the course of less than 48 hours to establish the essentials for opening a Warming Center (facility, supervision, and volunteer staff), do effective outreach to our local unhoused population, and line up supplies, materials, food, and other needed supplemental items. The Warming Center was open and operational for five consecutive nights.

Fifteen individuals from our community were served by the Warming Center. (This is an updated number based on reports from the Warming Center on-site supervisors.) The Warming Center was supported by twenty-nine volunteers, and the charitable donations of space, time, and resources courtesy of many individuals and organizations. It was truly a team effort, done with a sense of urgency, to serve an immediate need.

#### THE BASIC DATA: A SUCCESSFUL EFFORT

These are final numbers updated as of this report date.

Total Unique People Served: 15 (5F/10M)

5 days of use: 2 people (1F/1M)

3 days of use: 1- person (1F/0M)

2 days of use: 3 people (0F/3M)

1 day of use: 9 people (3F/6M)

Ages of People Served (estimates):

3 in their 20s (All 3 slept over)

5 in their 30s (3 slept over/2 brief visits)

4 in their 40s (All 3 slept over)

0 in their 50s or 60s

3 in their 70s or 80s (All 3 slept over)

Total Unique Volunteers: 29 (20F/9M)

5 shifts covered: 1 person (1F/0M)

4 shifts covered: 2 people (1F/1M)

3 shifts covered: 2 people (1F/1M)

2 shifts covered: 4 people (3F/1M)  
1- shift covered: 20 people (14F/6M)

Data for Wednesday Dec 14, 2022

9pm-8am open hours

7 people (3F/4M) using the Center

6 (3F/3M) slept the night

8 volunteer shifts covered by 4 volunteers

Data for Thu Dec 15, 2022

9pm-8am open hours

4 people (1F/3M) using the Center

4 (1F/3M) slept the night

8 volunteer shifts covered by 7 volunteers

Data for Friday Dec16, 2022

9pm-8am open hours

4 people (2F/2M) using the Center

4 (2F/2M) slept the night

8 volunteer shifts covered by 6 volunteers

Data for Saturday Dec 17, 2022

7pm-8am open hours

8 people (3F/5M) using the Center

5 (2F/3M) slept the night

10 volunteer shifts covered by 9 volunteers

Data for Sunday Dec 18.2022

7pm-8am open hours

5 people (2F/3M) using the Center

4 (2F/2M) slept the night

10 volunteer shifts covered by 10 volunteers

## THE FACILITY

The first challenge was a facility. As mentioned, the city does not own a facility that could be used as a Warming Center. That problem was solved when the non-profit Sebastopol Community Cultural Center agreed to make their large Main Hall available for use as a Warming Center. The facility is centrally located, is large, has heating and electricity, bathrooms, parking, and is managed by a Board and staff that are accustomed to handling large events and are committed to supporting the community. SCCC responded to the urgent request for space and within 24 hours had confirmed that the facility was available. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, and the City's limited resources, SCCC agreed to waive their facility fee in this instance. (We do not expect this nonprofit to be in a position to offer this courtesy in the future.)

## SUPERVISION

The second challenge was supervision. The city did not have staff to assign to supervise the Warming Center. On Wednesday December 14, at noon, we were still scrambling to line up supervision. At 3:30pm that same day, with the Warming Center scheduled to open at 9pm that night, the supervision question was finally resolved. Sonoma Applied Village Services generously assigned an employee to supervise the Warming Center, and the Sebastopol Community Cultural Center continued its support by assigning employees to be present.

## VOLUNTEERS

The third challenge was volunteer support. We did not have anyone to act as volunteer coordinator, so I stepped in to do this myself. We didn't know how many would need to be served at the Warming Center, but we did expect both men and women. We decided to line up two volunteers to be present at all times, and to make sure that at least one man and one woman were on staff throughout the open hours.

With input from Sebastopol's Homeless Outreach Coordinator Jennifer Lake, the volunteer shifts were set at three hours each. The open times were initially set for 9pm to 8am, but later changed to 7pm to 8am in response to the requests of those using the Warming Center.

I created a Google volunteer form to collect volunteer interest and contact information. We got the word out about our volunteer needs as best we could, with the support of many others who forwarded and shared the plea for volunteers. The volunteer shifts filled over the course of each day, with each day presenting gaps that were eventually filled, but often at the last minute.

Outreach to Volunteers was through the following methods:

1. An email sent to individuals I knew to be interested in helping with this effort.
2. An email sent to the following service/nonprofit groups: (1) Rotary Club of Sebastopol, (2) Rotary Club of Sebastopol Sunrise, (3) Kiwanis Club of Sebastopol, (4) Gravenstein Lions Club, (5) West County Soroptimists, (6) Gravenstein Health Action Coalition, (7) Meet Your Neighbors, (8) West County Community Services, (9) West County Health Centers, (9) and Sonoma Applied Village Service
3. A request for assistance and support sent directly to Sonoma County Supervisor Lynda Hopkins.
4. A volunteer plea posted on the Center for Volunteer and Nonprofit Leadership's volunteer website by CVNL Volunteer Services Manager Jessica Grace-Gallagher.
5. A request for volunteers posted on Nextdoor.

## GETTING THE WORD OUT TO THE UNHOUSED COMMUNITY

At the same time, we were pulling together the basic infrastructure for the Warming Center, we were also doing outreach to make sure the local unhoused community knew about the Warming Center. Again, partnerships and support in the community solved this issue.



Outreach to the unhoused community was accomplished by the following means:

1. Jennifer Lake, Sebastopol's Homeless Outreach Coordinator, who is in close contact with local unhoused, got the word out, and spoke directly to those she felt were most vulnerable in our community.
2. Kris White of Sebastopol Christian Church is a nexus for getting information to the unhoused. He runs the Barnabas Project, with offers twice weekly free showers and breakfast/lunch, and manages a Saturday meal program for locals. Kris spread the word about the Warming Center.
3. Various local advocates for the unhoused spread the word. These included Arthur George of West County Homeless Advocates, and Suzanne Lande and others with Sebastopol Homeless Support.
4. All those contacted for volunteers were aware of the Warming Center and undoubtedly spread the word to their clients.
5. The Sebastopol Police were informed of the Warming Center, so they could share the information with anyone they encountered on their regular shifts in Sebastopol.
6. A flyer was posted at the Plaza, Copperfield's, and at the Sebastopol Library.

We did not do a broad promotion of the Warming Center. The Center was intended to serve our local Sebastopol homeless, and the outreach plan was targeted for that purpose. Feedback from all organizations and the unhoused community confirms that outreach was effective and that the local community was well aware of the location, hours, and services of the Warming Center.

#### MATERIALS, SIGNAGE, FORMS, FOOD

The City did not have any pre-arranged policies or protocols, or the related materials, signage, forms, or arrangements for food that would go along with those policies or protocols. These developed as we went along, as follows:

1. Outreach Materials: Google Volunteer Interest Form, Emails for volunteer outreach and to announce Warming Center open hours, Nextdoor volunteer plea notices.
2. Signage: A sign for the front door of the facility, listing open hours, mask requirements, and the expectation of a quiet, respectful environment for all using the facility, plus table signs welcoming those using the facility, stating the mask requirement and that free masks are available.
3. Volunteer Sign In Sheets (new one for each night), with contact names and phone numbers for supervisors, volunteers, police, and Diana Rich as resource.
4. Volunteer Waiver Forms
5. Tally Sheets for Volunteers to keep track of number of people using the facility, and also for Volunteers to use for documenting their input and comments.
6. Plenty of free masks to set at the entry table.
7. Sleeping bags and coats and other warm weather gear. These were provided by West County Community Services, Sebastopol Christian Church, Arthur George of West County Homeless Advocates, and a variety of volunteers.

8. Food: On the google volunteer form we included a request for volunteers to bring coffee at 7am, pizza in the evening, water, rolls or other breakfast items, and snacks.

Sebastopol Christian Church's Barnabas Project (Kris White) brought coffee each morning. Other volunteers took care of the rest.

9. Distribution of Left-Over Food: All of this was delivered to the Barnabas Project at Sebastopol Christian Church for use at the Program's breakfast, lunch, and Saturday meals.

I have retained the various materials, signage, and forms created for the December 2022 Warming Center, and would be happy to share those if they would be helpful.

## COSTS

With no Warming Center Policy in place, the issue of expenses was a major concern. Fortunately, even though there was no policy in place, the City Council had set aside \$8,000 in the 2022-23 Budget so that there would be at least a minimal source of reimbursement for costs that might be associated with warming and/or cooling centers. Of course, \$8,000 is much less than it would take to operate fully functioning warming and/or cooling centers needed over the course of a year in Sebastopol.

Cost this Time was Minimal: Fortunately, for this one five-day span, the Sebastopol Warming Center was a largely charitable effort. Total costs will be less than \$2000, to reimburse Sonoma Applied Village Services and the Sebastopol Community Cultural Center for the costs of supplying their employees to supervise the Warming Center.

Cost in Future will be Much Higher: Future Warming and/or Cooling Centers for Sebastopol will require substantially higher funding. The following expenses should be taken into consideration: facility fees, the costs of a logistics and volunteer coordinator, and the costs of food, beverage, and other supplies and materials. All of these were offered for free in this instance, by a community responding to an urgent plea for assistance. However, to the extent the City of Sebastopol plans to operate Warming and/or Cooling Centers in the future, there will need to be funding set aside to cover these costs. That would leave only the volunteer staff as unpaid. In this community, based on the response to the volunteer plea in this instance, I expect we can continue to rely on volunteer staffing. Necessary funding would be to cover facility fees, a paid logistics and volunteer coordinator, paid supervisors for all open hours for the Center, and an allocation for food, beverages, supplies, and materials.

## Conclusion

As your appointed Liaison to Homeless Service Providers, I am pleased to report that this was a very successful effort by our small town, acting out of an urgent need to serve community members facing freezing weather. I am amazed by the generosity and responsiveness of everyone who made it a reality. Our homeless service providers were essential partners in this effort. The effectiveness of the outreach to our unhoused community was impressive. I am hopeful that this City Council can take the lessons learned from this experience, done in a

scramble of necessity, and use them to establish a policy, funding and all necessary arrangements required to open and operate future Warming and Cooling Centers in a more orderly fashion. I am available to provide any additional details that might be useful to the city Council's or City Staff's work on this issue.

## **EXHIBIT 2**

### **Warming Center Policy-City of Santa Rosa**

Last Updated: 1/9/2023

**PURPOSE:** To provide guidelines and procedures to open an “Extreme Weather Warming Center” in the City of Santa Rosa for the unsheltered population.

#### **DEFINITIONS:**

Extreme Weather Event– Anytime the National Weather Service (“NWS”) forecasts:

- Three (3) consecutive days with overnight lows below 32 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Three (3) consecutive nights of rainfall with extreme risk levels as determined by the NWS.
- A combination of the Extreme Weather Events defined above.

Extreme Weather Warming Center – An indoor or outdoor location that provides heated space to seek temporary relief from the wet/cold when an Extreme Weather Event occurs.

**POLICY:** The City of Santa Rosa recognizes that in the event of an Extreme Weather Event unsheltered individuals may need assistance to stay warm. To meet this need, the City of Santa Rosa may supplement existing Sonoma County’s Winter Shelter operations by operating Extreme Weather Warming Center(s) at times and locations as necessary. All efforts will be made to first connect individuals with available shelter space.

#### **PROCEDURES:**

The City Manager (or designee) may direct the establishment of Extreme Weather Warming Center(s) during an Extreme Weather Event based on weather confirmation by the Fire Department. This may include weather events fewer than three (3) consecutive days/nights which present extreme risk levels as determined by the NWS and at the direction of the City Manager. The coordination and opening of Extreme Weather Warming Center(s) will be led by the department assigned by the City Manager.

Operational hours will typically be between 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. but may vary based on weather conditions and space availability.

1. The City Manager (or designee) will be notified by the Fire Department of the need to open an Extreme Weather Warming Center based on forecasted conditions provided to the Fire Department by the NWS. She/he will take the necessary steps to identify and open an Extreme Weather Warming Center with the lead department, either indoor or outdoor, at a facility or in coordination with the City’s homeless services operator in support of the unsheltered population.

2. If an Extreme Weather Warming Center needs to be opened on a weekend or holiday, the same procedure applies. The City Manager (or designee) will be the first notified of the need to open an Extreme Weather Warming Center.
3. Once the location of the Extreme Weather Warming Center is determined, the lead department will notify the City's Communications Officer, who will then coordinate with any affected department(s) to provide public notifications including media releases, social media messaging and publication to City websites/newsflash items.
  - a. Individuals seeking an Extreme Weather Warming Center will be advised:
    - The Extreme Weather Warming Center is a drop-in place to warm up and charge devices, it is not a shelter and no cots for sleeping will be provided.
    - No television or radio will be available at the Extreme Weather Warming Center, but visitors may bring, charge and use their own devices.
    - Light snacks and beverages may be provided.
    - Food that is ready to eat is permissible; kitchen access will not be available.
    - Due to space limitations, no more than one small tote and daypack per person is allowed.
    - The City of Santa Rosa or its contractor(s) will not be responsible for lost or stolen items.
    - Visitors must comply with the City's Standards of Behavior/Code of Conduct (attached).
    - Pets other than service animals may be permitted at the Extreme Weather Warming Center at the sole discretion of the City's homeless services operator.
    - Information about Sonoma County Animal Services 'Warming Van' or other arrangements will be shared, if it is available.
4. The Fire Department will contact Sonoma County Animal Services to determine their availability; the current contact is Brian Whipple, Operations Manager, 707-565-7101, [Brian.Whipple@sonoma-county.org](mailto:Brian.Whipple@sonoma-county.org)
5. The lead department will contact Catholic Charities to determine their availability; the current contact is Matthew Verscheure, Chief Program Officer, 707-525-0227, [mverscheure@srcharities.org](mailto:mverscheure@srcharities.org).
6. Information that is disseminated to the public and is vital to the health and safety of the community should be coordinated for translation into alternative language(s), as necessary, by the Communications Officer and made available to the City Council, Sonoma County Emergency Services, Sonoma County Public Health, Catholic Charities and the American Red Cross (when applicable) prior to the final media release to the public.
  - a. Note: In the event immediate translation is needed, and the services are unavailable, it is acceptable to utilize the translation feature on the public facing website ([www.srcity.org](http://www.srcity.org)) for translation purposes.

## STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR

For the enjoyment and safety of everyone, the City of Santa Rosa expects all participants to treat the people and facilities connected with the program with respect and abide by all rules and direction from staff. City staff, or the City's homeless services operator, reserves the right to refuse services to anyone for failure to abide by these standards.

The following are examples of behavior that fail to meet the expectations of the Standards of Behavior Policy.

- Disruptive, disrespectful, inappropriate behavior, acts of violent behavior or any behavior which interferes with the enjoyment or intent of the programs and facilities offered to the residents of Santa Rosa will not be tolerated.
- Unacceptable behaviors include but are not limited to: failure to abide by all rules, forms of harassment, offensive language, disobedience, disruptive behavior, physical harm to others or property, or the threat of physical harm, or any behavior which may impact the safety of any employee or participant of activities offered. Or, any demonstration of behavior which interferes with the smooth operation of programs and facilities.
- Smoking is not permitted within City facilities or parks.

*Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.*