

Emphasis on Framingham's homeless in frigid nights ahead

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Greater Framingham Community Church pastor Rev. J. Anthony Lloyd, offers a blessing at the annual holiday party for residents of SMOC's single adult housing Thursday at the church.

FRAMINGHAM - Dawn McEwan, a homeless Framingham woman, has a message for anyone in similar straits who is resisting help from shelter workers and police as the bitter cold of winter sets in.

"Come see SMOC. They help you if you come to them," she said, using the common acronym for the South Middlesex Area Opportunity Council, which operates several area shelters.

McEwan was among 150 homeless people who attended SMOC's annual holiday luncheon Thursday afternoon at the Greater Framingham Community Church.

She said she planned to spend the night in the Ashland shelter for women.

"People feel like they have to put their tail between their legs but it's not about that."

McEwan is among the dozens of area women staying at the Ashland shelter as dangerously frigid temperatures gripped the region on Thursday. Dozens of men find refuge at a shelter in Framingham. Humanitarian workers and police officers in downtown made the homeless a top priority.

The two SMOC shelters in the area, one for men in Framingham and for women in Ashland, have opened doors to anyone, and the Framingham Police Department put out a directive to all its patrolmen to help get the homeless indoors.



Juri Love who played piano at the annual holiday party for residents of SMOC's single adult housing, gives a kiss to Jayla.

The overnight low Thursday was projected to be 2 degrees with a wind chill of minus 15 degrees. Steady winds around 13 to 17 mph were expected with occasional gusts of 60 mph. Light snow flurries were also anticipated, according to the National Weather Service, which predicts a 40 percent chance of snow but little to no accumulation.

At the SMOC party, aid workers, police and town officials emphasized the importance of finding heated shelter.

Aid workers said available space is a secondary concern on such cold nights.

"We'll put people on the couch, on the floor, on the mat, wherever we need to," said Beth Connolly, SMOC Common Ground Resource Center director.

Steve Buma, a patrol officer on the downtown beat, said officers do what they can to get homeless indoors, but there are limitations.

"If they want to get off the streets, yes, we will pick them up. Basically anyone who is outside who doesn't want to be outside has that option, he said.

But, he said, a handful of people opt to stay outside. The police can't force them indoors; only convince them it's not worth braving the conditions.

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United Way employees Julianna Mastrapasqua, left and Mahsa Gharamian, serve meals at the annual holiday party.