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Prescott Area Women's Shelter open for business

Effort focuses on giving shelter, safety to homeless women



By T.M.
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The Daily Courier

Mostly they live in the shadows - in the shadows of mountains like Thumb Butte, in their cars, in tents within the [Prescott National Forest](#), anywhere they can find a tiny piece of shelter and safety.

They are the homeless women who exist in the Tri-City area with little acknowledgement from the general public.

Local experts estimate that on any given day roughly 62 women within Yavapai County - which is the size of New Jersey - have no home to go to, no bed to sleep in, no place to call their own.

That's why Erika Stone, program and outreach coordinator for the Prescott Area **Women's Shelter** (PAWS), wants to get the word out that the shelter is open year-round now to any woman who needs a safe place to spend the night.

Lt. Andy Reinhardt, spokesman for the [Prescott Police Department](#), said the area definitely has a homeless problem.

But, he said, "Homeless women are rarely seen because they often find help from relatives or other sources."

But when they can't, he said, it's more dangerous for them to be homeless than it is for men.

"Women (can't) defend themselves as easily as men," Reinhardt said.

Currently the Prescott **Women's Shelter** has 15 beds, one crib and one child's bed but only four to six women on any one night avail themselves of the shelter's services, Stone said.

She thinks it's because, "We haven't built a reputation yet with the homeless community."

She also thinks some misperceptions exist that might be keeping women away. For example, she said, some people think PAWS won't take domestic violence victims.

That's not true, Stone said: "We absolutely want any woman in crisis to come to our shelter...but our goal will be to get her into a different situation as soon as possible."

That's because the shelter's address is public, unlike domestic violence shelters.

Another misperception she says is that PAWS has a strict and lengthy set of rules governing client's behaviors.

While the shelter does have a few rules, they aren't onerous, Stone said.

For example, lights dim at 8 p.m. and bedtime is at 10 p.m. And women who stay there must contribute to any chores that need doing.

The shelter, at 336 Rush St., is handicapped accessible, including a handicapped accessible shower, and it has a washer and dryer in its community room.

Each night from 5 - 6 p.m. intake begins and volunteers assign beds on a first come, first served basis.

While the facility is open to any woman, the shelter's target populations are women just out of prison, discharged from psychiatric hospitals, suffering with substance abuse problems or mental illness, the unemployed or those leaving an abusive relationship, Stone explained.

The shelter used to be open only part-time in the winter at an area church. But thanks to a couple of major grants - especially one from Yavapai County Community Foundation - it was able to reopen full time at its current location on Feb. 2.

It takes about \$15,000 a year to keep the shelter open, and Stone says the shelter always needs volunteers and money donations.

The shelter especially needs volunteers to provide a meal for the women each night and a cold breakfast for the next morning, Stone said.

Shelter officials also are hoping someone will donate a computer - they already have a keyboard and a monitor - so the women can search the Internet for work.

And the shelter always needs things like cleaning supplies and hygiene products, Stone said, and more bunk beds would increase the shelter's capacity.

For more information about the shelter, or to volunteer to help, contact Stone at 778-5933 or email her at estone@ycvp.org.

You also can view the PAWS website at www.prescottshelter.org.

UPDATE - CORRECTION, March 24: Sunday's story on the Prescott Women's Shelter should have said that the shelter's \$15,000 operating budget was only for a four-month period. The shelter's yearly budget is approximately \$150,000.

Also, the shelter needs bunk beds to free up space, not to increase capacity, which must remain at 15 people. In addition, the washer and drier in the community room is not for overnight guests.



Matt Hinshaw/The Daily Courier
Erika Stone, the program and outreach coordinator, makes one of the 15 beds at the Prescott Area Women's Shelter Wednesday morning in Prescott. The shelter is now open for business for the Prescott area's homeless women.