

Emergency hotline started for those at risk of becoming homeless

Trentonian 1/12/04

Samantha Craggs — Osprey News Network

SOCIAL SERVICES

A new emergency hotline has been established for low-income people at risk of being homeless.

Hastings County has used National Housing Day as an opportunity to launch 1-866-414-0300, a 24-hour, toll free service aimed at reaching people in crisis who have nowhere to go.

The line is designed to be a place people can call in the middle of the night if they are in urgent need of shelter, said Eric Fry, Hastings County director of social services.

He cited the example of a recent fire in Deseronto where a single mother and her children

were left standing outside in the middle of the night having lost all of their possessions.

The line will also be useful for women fleeing violent situations, Fry said.

"When the office is closed, those people need to connect to a real person right now," Fry said. "This gives them a way to get a ride, or it gets them to a hotel and gets them tucked in for the night until we can get it figured out."

The emergency line is provided in partnership with the Belleville Salvation Army, which has a service agreement to answer the calls.

Emergency services providers such as police, fire and paramedics will also know the new number.

The Salvation Army current-

ly offers an after hours line. It was part of the Regional Homelessness Initiative's recommendation to implement a number that was free and county-wide.

Someone in a homeless situation may not have the information available to call for help, said Hastings warden Clarence Ziemman in a release this week.

"It is our responsibility as service providers to ensure the information is available to everyone in Hastings County," he said.

The hotline was announced at a forum on homelessness hosted by the Affordable Housing Action Network, an organization representing about 30 local agencies.

Discussion that day empha-

sized the need for communities to pool their resources to prevent homelessness, said Carmela Ruberto, Hastings County community programs co-ordinator.

In Windsor, for example, the University of Windsor has students of social services, nursing and music visit low-income housing developments and engage people in the community, Ruberto said.

A similar program may be struck with Loyalist College. National Housing Day gives social services agencies a day to regroup and feel optimistic, Ruberto said.

"Nov. 22 was a day to renew our optimism and our enthusiasm," she said.

"People left feeling excited about the year ahead."