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NEWS

'It comes down to saving lives': New warming centre welcomed in Clarington

Site added thanks to community partnerships

Officials are welcoming a new overnight warming centre in Clarington.

By **Moya Dillon** Clarington This Week

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The Region of Durham has opened a new winter warming centre in Clarington at St. Paul's United Church. Metroland file photo

Clarington is now home to an overnight warming centre, to serve unsheltered residents through the frigid winter months.

Clarington Winter Warming opened Jan. 18 at St. Paul's United Church in Bowmanville, thanks to a joint effort by Clarington municipal staff, church staff and the Region of Durham, which oversees warming centres across the region.

“The need is really across the region, so we’re always looking for partnerships in the community that can be offered,” said Sahar Foroutani, system manager for homelessness with the region. “St. Paul’s Church approached us with the space and the willingness to help those in need, and Clarington has been supremely supportive. This whole collaborative partnership happened because we do need to expand, rather than having pockets where winter warming is located; we’d like to expand it across the region.”

Foroutani said there are two critical pieces needed to establish a new centre, the first being space, and the second the expertise to run the service. Clarington Winter Warming, which is run by Oshawa non-profit Do Unto Others (DUO), has the capacity for 10 adults, with pets allowed, and runs nightly from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. through March 31.

Clarington Mayor Adrian Foster praised the new service, and credited church members and Clarington Public Library staff, who are often on the front lines assisting unsheltered residents with services such as their food pantry, for their assistance with the warming centre.

“The library was phenomenal and then, the most important part of course, the congregation,” he said. “They were more than accommodating, they were bending over backwards to welcome folks into the church with a variety of services, including the warming centre.”

He said the service is integral to ensuring the safety of all residents.

“It can literally save people’s lives, if we look at our quality of life or feeling good about our community, seeing people sleeping in alcoves or on a bench in the cold, I don’t think anyone doesn’t feel distraught about that,” he said. “Knowing that some of the most vulnerable people in our community are being taken care of is uplifting, although we’ve got a lot of problems to work on yet. The reality is given the challenges with everything, from the economy, affordability and other services that need to be provided for this population, it’s likely to get worse before it gets better, but what a great first effort.”

Foroutani also emphasized the importance of having warming centres available throughout the region.

“Homelessness is a global issue, every province and every city has homelessness whether it’s hidden or visible, so the impact really comes down to saving lives,” she explained. “These individuals don’t have anywhere to go and when the weather becomes life threatening, this becomes a matter of life and death.”

For more information on the region’s winter warming plan, visit www.durham.ca.



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