

Homeless program adds permanent shelter for women

As the first frosts steal across the region, Arundel House of Hope, a program that offers temporary shelter for the homeless in Anne Arundel County, opens its door – or rather, the doors of area churches.

This year, another door will open, on a permanent shelter that can accommodate up to five homeless women.

Women in Save Haven (WISH) will open in December in a five-bedroom house in Brooklyn Park that also features a staff apartment. It will shelter women who have been on the street for a year or more or homeless three times within the last four years.

“They have a lot of difficult issues,” said Arundel House of Hope executive director Mario Berninzoni, adding that WISH will provide case management.

Arundel House of Hope rotates its Winter Relief Program among some 40 churches throughout the county, which take turns sheltering the homeless for a week at a time, offering them dinners and breakfasts prepared by parishioners.

“We encourage the parishioners to eat with them,” Mr. Berninzoni said, explaining the program chose to forego a more permanent shelter “because we wanted folks to have that chance for fellowship.” People who volunteer gain a new perspective on the issues surrounding homelessness.

“If we had our own shelter we would miss out on that fellowship,” he added. “We felt that was a real spiritual connection.”

“When they sit down with them, they learn about the homeless, they can put a face with the problem,” said Joe Dulany, a longtime volunteer at St. Bernadette, Severn.

The participating Catholic parishes are: Holy Trinity, Glen Burnie; St. Bernadette, Severn; Crucifixion, Glen Burnie; Our Lady of the Fields, Millersville; Our Lady of

the Chesapeake, Lake Shore; St. Andrew by the Bay, Annapolis; and St. Joseph, Odenton.

Although the program mostly serves men “about three years ago we started serving single adult women,” Mr. Berninzoni said. “The first year we served four or five, then eight or nine the next year, and last year we served about 15 women each night. We realized there was a need for single adult women’s services.”

Last year, the churches sheltered the homeless for a total of 147 nights and fed them 23,274 meals. The average number of guests per night was 44, for a total of 222 homeless people given shelter - a 62 percent increase from the year before.

Because WISH - which costs \$75,000, funding that comes from federal grants and the churches - only can take five women, the Winter Relief Program will continue to accept women.

Arundel House of Hope also is planning to start a business to employ the homeless, not just to give them a much-needed opportunity but also to provide revenue for the program.

“I am very pleased that the parishioners of St. Bernadette have been such an important part of the Arundel House of Hope as it grew from 12 churches providing 12 weeks of shelter to churches providing 37 shelter weeks, plus providing transitional housing and permanent housing to those who were previously homeless,” said Mr. Dulany.