

The County Seat Without a Chair to be Found

Shay Lipshitz

Shay Lipshitz is the newest member of the Board of Directors of the Delaware Housing Coalition. She is the Director of Brandywine Counseling's Project Renewal in Sussex County.

Not a chair to be found, or a bed, or a room. The housing situation in Georgetown leaves many without a place to sit, lay down, or to live. This winter was particularly harsh and Brandywine Counseling's Project Renewal saw just what that meant.

This new program opened and admitted the first clients in September 2003. This is a federally funded three-year program that targets homeless persons with substance abuse problems in Sussex County.

Out-patient substance abuse counseling is provided along with case management. The goals are to help 30 homeless persons a year to stop using alcohol and other drugs and to become employed and housed. The program design was to have outreach workers go out and find the homeless. But, we didn't have to. They found us!

The problem was far more pervasive than anticipated. From the very start, right after an open house in September 2003 homeless men and women were coming to us. They were calling and walking in the door looking for help. Not everyone had a drug or alcohol problem. Some people came to us just looking for emergency housing. Sussex County has limited and inadequate resources for emergency placement. All we were able to do was to provide a phone and list of area shelters. The persons meeting our criteria are evaluated and admitted to the program, but this still does not guarantee we can find them housing. Currently in Sussex County there are less than 40 beds available for emergency shelter. The majority of these beds are for women. Single men are at an even greater risk for homelessness.

This past January, when the temperatures were below freezing, the homeless were knocking on the front door. The target number for the grant year was 30 clients. In the beginning of December we already had 21 clients. The phone kept ringing and intake appointments were being scheduled daily. As the temperatures decreased, the persons seeking our help increased.

Four blocks from the Georgetown "Circle", a group of men were living in a boarded up abandoned house. One came to us for help. We learned he had huddled together with the others to sleep and stay warm. Another man came to us burned from a fire he had made outdoors to cook his food. The men smelt of kerosene, urine, and alcohol. The blood alcohol levels were staggering, one was as high as .424 (this is four times greater than the



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