



## County gets federal money for programs for homeless

By PAUL H. HEINTZ, Reformer Staff

BRATTLEBORO -- More than 60 people gathered outside the Centre Congregational Church Friday evening during the annual candlelight vigil for the homeless.

state, including two in Windham County. The town of Brattleboro will receive \$185,604 to renew funding for its Shelter Plus Care program, and Windham County Homeless Outreach will receive \$55,524.

"This is excellent. How wonderful for it to happen today," Bussino said just after she learned of the grants later in the evening.

The Shelter Plus Care program, according to Bussino, serves up to 23 households with a disabled family member and provides them with a housing subsidy so they pay no more than 30 percent of their income.

"It's an excellent program. It's one of the best programs out there," she said.

Windham County Homeless Outreach is a collaboration between the Drop In Center and Morningside Shelter which helps identify homeless people and provide drug and alcohol services and counseling.

"It's a vital piece to how we keep homeless people served and protected and outreached to," Bussino said.

The other piece of good news Friday was the announcement of a new overflow shelter in the fellowship room of the First Baptist Church. Participants in the vigil crossed the street from the Congregational Church to the Baptist Church and sang more songs before members of the local clergy blessed the new space.

Pastor Suzanne Curtis of the First Baptist Church said the new overflow shelter evolved out of discussions between members of the Brattleboro Area Interfaith Clergy Association -- many of whom often receive phone calls from people looking for a

Saturday, December 22

Dressed in warm winter clothing, holding candles and singing, they kept in their thoughts those who will spend many cold nights outside this winter.

"There are over 15 people who will sleep on the streets of Brattleboro tonight," Brattleboro Area Drop In Center executive director Melinda Bussino told the crowd. "People are hungry, people are cold, people are homeless and at risk of becoming homeless."

Under the direction of Guilford Community Church choir director Peter Amidon, vigil attendees raised their voices in song before Bussino and Warm Hands Warm Heart executive director Russ West addressed the group.

The vigil took place on the shortest day of 2007 -- but this year there were a couple rays of sunshine to brighten the spirits of those who work with chronic homelessness.

On Friday afternoon, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced \$2.8 million in grants to 20 homeless programs in the

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place to stay. With the Morningside Shelter nearly always full, the group hoped to find a place that could house more homeless people when needed.

Curtis said it made sense for the Baptist Church to offer its space for the shelter because it already hosts Grace's Kitchen every Wednesday night.

The shelter will open for the first time next week, but because of restrictions set by the church's insurance company it can only be used when the temperature dips below 12 degrees Fahrenheit, when more than five inches of snow covers the ground, or if there is a severe wind chill or an ice storm.

The shelter is need of volunteers who can oversee it from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., donations of food and sleeping pads.

"The local faith community has really embraced this as an issue," Bussino said.

Those interested in volunteering for the shelter or donating money or supplies can reach Bussino at 802-257-2005, ext. 103, and Morningside Shelter executive director Paul Capcara at 802-257-0066, ext. 102.

Paul Heintz can be reached at [pheintz@reformer.com](mailto:pheintz@reformer.com) or 802-254-2311, ext. 275.

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