

Storms strain resources for homeless in Virginia Beach

By Stacy Parker
The Virginian-Pilot
© January 30, 2014

VIRGINIA BEACH

Back-to-back snowstorms have strained the winter shelter program for the city's homeless, and a volunteer church is handling people needing a warm place to stay.

King's Grant Baptist Church housed 94 people Tuesday night - about 34 more than the program's capacity.

Buses and vans left the Lighthouse Center, a day shelter at the Oceanfront that is the intake point for the overnight program, earlier than normal Tuesday night as snow began to blanket the region. The homeless were taken to the church, where they stayed overnight.

On most mornings, volunteers wake the guests early for a hot breakfast, and buses bring them back to the day shelter, where shower and laundry facilities are available. On Wednesday morning, though, the visitors stayed put at the church until one large bus was able to navigate the roads and make multiple trips to the Lighthouse Center. Volunteers shoveled snow around the center and King's Grant Baptist.

"It's been a big collaboration this week," said Deborah Maloney, director of Volunteers of America, which operates the center.

For the past 10 days or so, as temperatures dropped below freezing, the center has been under a "weather watch," meaning staff and volunteers expected an influx of people.

"We've been pulling an extra load," Maloney said.

They're running low on blankets. Gloves, hats and toiletries also are needed. When road conditions improve, items can be dropped off at the center at 825 18th St.

The Lighthouse Center opened in 1997 and is partially funded through federal grants distributed by the city's Housing & Neighborhood Preservation department, but it also relies on donations.

The winter night shelter program in Virginia Beach rotates weekly among 23 churches and one synagogue. It was scheduled to move from King's Grant Baptist to Turning Point Church & Ministries on Wednesday, but that church was unable to accommodate the number of people in need. To help out, Turning Point volunteers sent over paper goods and dinner.

The program will remain at King's Grant Baptist until Saturday, said Skip Wallace, senior pastor. Church volunteers have been cooking breakfast and preparing bread

lunches for the homeless guests since last week.

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