



# The Daily Courier

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## New shelter will offer winter haven for women, children

By **Cindy Barks**  
The Daily Courier

Monday, November 26, 2007



The Daily Courier/Les Stukenberg Volunteers James MacDonald, left, and Joe Watkins move one of the dividers as they start setting up the first Prescott Area Winter Shelter for women and women with children at the Hillside Church of God on Ruth Street in Prescott.

the community will help get the shelter on its feet.

PRESCOTT - For Pastor Warren Robertson of the Hillside Church of God, the direction was clear.

When he heard that a local coalition of non-profit and religious organizations was working to start a winter shelter for homeless women and children, Robertson thought immediately of the large basement space at his church's new location on Ruth Street.

"Jesus talked about helping widows and orphans in the Bible," Robertson said, noting that he saw a parallel with homeless women with children.

That led Robertson to take an idea to his congregation: Why not offer the basement space to the coalition for use as a temporary shelter?

While the idea was initially a "hard sell," Robertson said the church ultimately voted unanimously to offer its space for the shelter.

So, for the first time this winter, the Prescott area will have a homeless shelter that will cater specifically to women and children.

The Prescott Area Winter Shelter - a coalition of five main sponsors and another half-dozen supporters - plans to open its doors on Dec. 1, at 937 Ruth St. in the lower level of the Hillside Church of God - formerly the Potter's House - and run until the end of

February.

An open house will take place at the church from 3 to

6 p.m. Wednesday. Organizers hope support from

Robertson is just one of the many local supporters who have pitched in so far on planning for the Prescott Area Winter Shelter.

Buz Davies, board president of the Coalition for Compassion and Justice, told a group of about 30 advocates who met at the church this past week that the women's homeless shelter has been an identified community need for years.

While the Project Aware shelter has operated on Leroux Street since the early 1990s, it takes in only homeless men; shelter advocates have long pointed to the need for a location that could accommodate families consisting of women and children.

"We've had a sense for a long time that there was not enough capacity for women and children," Davies said.

Calling the Hillside Church of God's offering of its basement "your church's Christmas gift to the community," Davies said the involved organizations hope that the temporary winter shelter will be "the basis for moving forward with something a little more permanent."

Fred Thatcher of the Project Aware board, who is helping with the planning, agrees that the need for a women's shelter has grown. Even though he pointed out that a charitable voucher system already exists that offers motel rooms to homeless women, Thatcher said the existence of a shelter would help to

"take much of that off the streets."

As the need escalated, the Coalition for Compassion

and Justice advertised for an Americorps VISTA worker to help coordinate the project.

That is where Ali Kate Kopinto came in. A spring graduate of [Prescott College](#), Kopinto was searching for a job "where I could truly make a difference."

She applied for the Coalition for Compassion and Justice's position and got the job.

When she came on board in September as community organizer and shelter coordinator, Kopinto said, "I felt nothing but amazing support from the leaders."

She immediately began building on the various organizations' previous work, and helped to form a specific board for the shelter.

Everything began multiplying from there, Davies said - to a point where he says, "I think we're going to break through. Too many good things have happened in the last month or so. I'm convinced that once the public knows what we're doing, they will get behind us."

Kopinto foresees a shelter that not only would offer a refuge to women and children, but one that would help them to find a way out of their current situations.

No one knows for sure how many women and children need the shelter's services, and Davies and Kopinto say this first year of operation will offer valuable demographic information.

According to a flyer for the shelter effort, groups involved in the Prescott Area Campus Coalition include: Catholic Charities; the Salvation Army; Society of St. Vincent de Paul; Coalition for Compassion and Justice; and the First Baptist Church Reach Out Program.

Other supporters include: Project Aware; Open Inn-Turning Point; Soroptimist International of Prescott; Stepping Stones Agencies; Yavapai County VISTA Project; and Hillside Church of God.

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