



NEWS RELEASE

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Winter Shelter Program Returns To Support Unhoused People in Harsh Weather *Local Governments & Nonprofits Collaborate for Second Year*

KALAMAZOO, Mich.— Area governments and nonprofit groups are working together again to ensure unhoused adults can access shelter and support services during the winter months.

The second year of this partnership offers more shelter space amid growing demand, said Patrese Griffin, Director of the Kalamazoo County Continuum of Care (CoC). Ministry With Community (MWC) and Kalamazoo Gospel Ministries (KGM) together will provide up to 210 nighttime shelter beds, plus 25 during extreme weather. For day shelter, the two organizations collectively will offer over 200 spots—those normally provided by MWC, plus 50 to be available through KGM. The program also starts Nov. 2, a month earlier than in 2025.

Total amount budgeted for the project is \$979,398, with funding from Kalamazoo County, the City of Kalamazoo, the City of Portage, the CoC and United Way of South Central Michigan (UWSCMI).

“The Continuum of Care is deeply grateful for the collaboration, expertise and generosity of Kalamazoo County and the cities of Kalamazoo and Portage, United Way, shelter providers and access coordinators, and everyone who shares this commitment to support those who have no safe place to go this winter,” said Griffin.

Accessing Shelter

The winter shelter project begins Nov. 2 and runs through March 31, 2027. Ministry With Community, last year's lead shelter partner, returns this winter with more shelter beds and day shelter spots. Kalamazoo Gospel Ministries, another participant in the first program, takes on a larger role this year. Housing Resources Inc. (HRI) provides shelter access coordination.

“Everyone deserves a safe, warm place to turn when temperatures drop. By expanding shelter capacity and opening earlier this year, we can reach more neighbors who need support. We’re grateful to our community partners for coming together to provide this vital resource while helping people build stability and move forward,” said Ministry With Community Executive Director Sid Ellis.

“No one should have to face a Michigan winter without a safe, warm place to go. Kalamazoo Gospel Ministries is grateful to expand our role this year by providing both overnight shelter and daytime services. Through this partnership, we can meet immediate needs with compassion while also helping guests connect with the relationships, resources and support that can lead toward lasting stability,” said KGM President & CEO Pastor John Simpson.

HRI Executive Director Michelle Davis added, “The power of partnership continues to drive our community’s approach to helping unhoused individuals and families. HRI is proud to be an integral part of this work.”

Here’s how the process works:

- An unhoused adult seeking shelter can contact HRI 24 hours a day by calling 269-382-0287 and pressing 1 to be connected with an Intake Specialist.
- The Intake Specialist determines the caller’s specific needs. If the caller requires night shelter, the Intake Specialist will match that person to an open spot if one is available. Ministry With Community and Kalamazoo Gospel Ministries update that list daily. For day shelter, HRI will refer the caller to local providers.
- Anyone assigned an overnight shelter bed may retain that bed without calling again, provided it is used each day. If the bed goes unused, it will be returned to the inventory of available beds.
- Beyond shelter space, HRI also connects people with other programs and services that can help them get back on their feet.

Although this program focuses on individual adults, HRI also coordinates access for other agencies and programs in Kalamazoo County, including those serving families and individuals with medical needs or disabilities. Anyone who needs assistance should call HRI, 269-382-0287, option 1.

Community Comes Together

Local community leaders said collaboration is crucial to addressing homelessness, from immediate shelter to chronic need.

“Last winter showed us both the importance of this program and the need for additional shelter options in our community,” said Jen Strebs, Chair of the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners. “By building on what we learned and expanding access to services, we’re helping more people find the support they need during the coldest months of the year. Kalamazoo County is proud to invest in this effort and work alongside our partners to make it possible.”

Kalamazoo City Manager Malcolm Hankins said, “As winter approaches, it is important that people who are unhoused in our community have access to safe, warm places to stay. Meeting this need takes the collective commitment of a community including the many organizations, each bringing important resources, experience, and compassion to the table. I appreciate the work of our community partners and their willingness to come together around a shared responsibility to care for our neighbors. While addressing immediate needs is essential, we must also continue working together to create pathways toward greater stability and permanent housing.”

“We’re proud to be at the table with our community partners to help ensure people have access to safe shelter during the winter months,” said Portage Acting City Manager Adam Herringa. “There is much more work to be done to address homelessness, and that work requires a coordinated approach that connects people with immediate support while expanding access to stable, permanent housing. In Portage, we’re working to increase housing options and recognize that a range of housing choices is essential to a healthy, thriving community. This partnership is an important part of our collective effort to support our most vulnerable residents.”

Results & Lessons Learned

During the winter of 2025-26, the shelter program provided 18,608 shelter nights over four months, with as many as 224 people sheltered on any given day. For those with needs including housing and beyond, 282 households were connected to other support services.

HRI, which coordinated shelter access during normal business hours last winter, has since expanded that service to 24 hours per day, seven days per week, for all shelter needs. The County’s

Keys To Kalamazoo initiative made this expanded resource possible. It also means HRI is coordinating access once again during the second winter shelter program. Similarly, medical respite care that sheltered individuals with health conditions last winter now operates year-round through Integrated Services of Kalamazoo (ISK) and the County's housing millage.

Griffin said the program's first year was a learning experience. Those lessons helped the project grow for the upcoming winter.

"We were able to make sure people had access to shelter during the coldest part of the year. At the same time, we knew it was a response to seasonal conditions, not a permanent solution to homelessness," Griffin said. "For every person able to access winter shelter, many more could not. That reflects the scale and complexity of the challenge.

"The biggest lesson learned was that collaboration can score some immediate wins while offering ways to grow support, services and partnerships to make those wins sustainable," she added.

"That dialogue continues as we work together for lasting solutions."

For more information about the winter shelter program, visit the CoC's website, kzococ.org. The page will be updated as the program unfolds during the winter.

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Information on winter shelter partners:

Ministry With Community – ministrywithcommunity.org

Kalamazoo Gospel Ministries – kzoogospel.org

Housing Resources Inc. – housingresourcesinc.org

Kalamazoo County – kalcounty.gov

City of Kalamazoo – kalamazoocity.org

City of Portage – portagemi.gov

United Way SCMI – unitedforscmi.org

Kalamazoo County CoC – kzoococ.org