

Overnight Warming Locations to Activate, Bring in Extra Services During Cold Snap

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON/EDWARDSVILLE - The Overnight Warming Locations in Alton and Edwardsville are gearing up for several days of activation to keep unhoused community members alive through the cold temperatures.

With [predictions of snow and temperatures in the single digits](#), the Overnight Warming Locations (OWL) will activate every night when the temperature is forecasted to drop below 20 degrees Fahrenheit. From 5 p.m. to 8:30 a.m., unhoused community members can come to Deliverance Temple in Alton or First Baptist Church in Edwardsville to have dinner, shower, spend the night and eat breakfast with volunteers.

“I think most people agree that everybody deserves a warm place to stay,” said OWL operations director Tyler Dreith. “Sometimes we argue on proximity and where that location should be, but over the last four-plus years now we’ve identified a good place in our community and we’ve had some good partnerships with neighbors and organizations to come alongside us to provide that overnight warming space and keep people off the streets.”

OWL is preparing to activate for several consecutive nights as a cold front approaches. They will be open for 24 hours on Sunday, Jan. 14, 2024, and Monday, Jan. 15, 2024, because most warming centers will be closed during the day for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

During these consecutive days of activation, OWL plans to bring in community partners like Alton Memorial Hospital and [Sacred Spaces of CARE](#) to provide healthcare and case management services. Dreith noted that they are eager to connect unhoused community members with services in the area, including barbers, dentists and other professionals who would be willing to donate their time and services.

“That’s something we’ve been wanting to do from the get-go because we want to get people inside, but we want to get them connected and get them well,” Dreith explained. “Sometimes it’s just hard to do that. Being activated from 5 p.m. to 8:30 in the morning, people are off who do this for a living. But some people are just willing. They’re looking for an opportunity to help and they just need some guidance. So we’re open to anything. We’re not set in stone with what we do. First and foremost, we want to keep people alive and off the streets. But yeah, we want to get them connected to services and ultimately get them well and get them housed someday.”

But Dreith emphasized that OWL meets people where they’re at, and volunteers never approach unhoused community members like “projects.” Instead, OWL encourages wellness and connection between unhoused neighbors and volunteers. Dreith noted that he has benefited from being a part of OWL, and he hopes the organization can help as many people as possible to stay alive through the winter and get connected to any services they want.

“Just to be seen and heard is important, just meeting people where they’re at,” he added. “We’re not looking at people as a project, like ‘I want to fix you.’ It’s just being present

with people, meeting them where they're at. And if they say, 'Yeah, I need some help with these services,' we'll try to do our best to connect them to services that might be helpful in their lives."

In the meantime, OWL is calling for volunteers who are willing to serve meals, spend time at the churches and monitor the spaces overnight. For those who want to help who can't commit to volunteering onsite, Dreith pointed out that they also need volunteers to help with laundry, running errands, coordinating meals and cleaning the facility.

"This has been a great grassroots drive and when we do these long stretches sometimes our resources are stretched thin and people get burnt out," Dreith said. "So I just encourage people, if you do have the capacity to help in any way, it's much appreciated."

You can go to the [official Overnight Warming Locations Facebook page](#) for more information, including how to volunteer, donate or offer professional services. The Facebook page also announces when OWL will activate. OWL is located at Deliverance Temple at 1125 E. 6th Street in Alton and First Baptist Church at 534 St. Louis Street in Edwardsville. [This article](#) on [RiverBender.com](#) also provides a list of daytime warming centers in Edwardsville.

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