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Homeless day center opens

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By [AMANDA LEHMERT](#)

Staff Writer

GREENSBORO — Volunteers painted the walls and screwed in the new light bulbs, and will soon have the showers flowing.

The city's new day center for homeless residents is now open for business.

Volunteers, with about \$30,000 in local grant money, have transformed unused classroom space at Bessemer United Methodist Church of 3015 E. Bessemer Ave. into an "interactive resource center" where homeless people or anyone in need of help can spend the daytime hours, clean up, and connect with social services.

The center will act as a pilot program for a permanent program that is under development by local aid groups and volunteers and could be open by the end of the year.

Organizers plan to keep the resource center open through March 15, to coincide with the winter emergency shelter initiative that has placed dozens of people in temporary housing for the cold months.

"It's cold and windy and nasty outside, and we needed something," said Liz Seymour, who helped put the center together.

The center will officially start offering programs like support groups and GED classes on Monday. There will be an open house for the general public Wednesday between 4 and 6 p.m.

Volunteers, including homeless residents, have been helping get the space into shape for the last two weeks.

"They feel like they're family," said Brantly Grier, one of the managers of the center. "I'm proud to be part of something like this."



Volunteer Michele Marsh and Fred Werstlein of the Barnabus Network transform Sunday School rooms at Bessemer United Methodist Church for their new role as the Interactive Resource Center.

Credit: H. Scott Hoffmann / News & Record

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The classrooms had not been used for 16 years, said Pastor Nick Scandale, who has seen the project reinvigorate his church.

"For me, this is a holy spirit thing. We made ourselves available," Scandale said. "People came out of the woodwork to volunteer. People say, 'What do you need?'"

One room will be outfitted with computers and used for skills classes. A small space at the end of the hall will act as an office for a congregational nurse, a housing specialist and other support people.

On Thursday, crews were scheduled to turn one room into a shower room with lockers and clothes washing machines.

The wash room will provide an important service to homeless residents, said Michele Marsh, who is living at the emergency shelter at Grace Church.

"Showers and the laundry facilities — that seems to be the hardest thing," said Marsh, a former phone operator who is looking for a job in catering or customer service. "You just have to make the best with what you have some days."

So far, 10 to 15 people have been coming every day.

Grier said they could serve up to 50 people daily, but will need volunteers to help run programs, welcome guests and make meals.

"If they come and volunteer they will see there is a sense of community," said Paul Gydos, a volunteer who is living at the temporary shelter at the Hive. "Hopefully this project will be a model that can be replicated."

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