

Groups seek answers at homelessness forum

Public meeting set for Wednesday evening at Rio Grande Fire Hall

By KRISTEN KELLEHER
Cape May Star and Wave

RIO GRANDE — From 2014 to 2018, there was a 74 percent increase in unsheltered persons in New Jersey, according to the NJ 2018 Point-in-Time Count Report.

The annual statewide count of individuals and families who experience homelessness or are at-risk of homelessness in the state is conducted each January.

The report identified 103 total homeless people in Cape May County, including 13 chronically homeless persons. Neighboring Atlantic County had 437 homeless persons, including 105 chronic homeless persons.

Statewide, the 2018 report identified 9,303 homeless people in the state, 1,288 of whom were identified as chronically homeless.

This week, the public can attend a forum to discuss ways of reducing homeless-

ness in the county.

Cape Assist, with the Cape May County Prosecutor's Office and the Cape May County Chiefs of Police Association, will host two forums Wednesday, Jan. 16, to discuss the causes of homelessness and long-term solutions.

A forum the morning of Jan. 16 is open to government officials, law enforcement workers, health care professionals and community organizations.

The public forum is in the evening, from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Rio Grande Fire Hall, 1120 S. Route 47 in Rio Grande.

Daniel McDonald will speak at both forums. According to information from Cape Assist, McDonald has 26 years of experience in law enforcement and homeless outreach in central Florida. He founded a police initiative to address the needs of the chronically homeless in 2012 and participated in community collaborations that slashed chronic homeless rates by 50 percent in three years.

Katie Faldetta, executive director of Cape Assist, said this is the first time this forum is taking place. She expects about 75 people at the morning session.

Faldetta said she would like to see more dialogue around the issue and dialogue around the need for a more permanent solution to chronic homelessness to come out of the forum.

"I can't think of any sec-

tor that isn't affected by homelessness, which is why we'd like to see as many people as possible come together to discuss a plan to stop homelessness," she said.

According to Faldetta, the forum is an opportunity for anyone in the community to learn about how another municipality addressed the problem.

"I'm just really excited to hear about what people have done and to get a starting point for a more long-term conversation. I'm very optimistic about what this community can do," she said.

Some of the nonprofit organizations that work with local homeless populations include Cape Hope, the Branches, Family Promise and Cape Counseling, according to Faldetta.

"In our county, Social Services tries really hard to provide assistance whenever they can with the limited amount of funding they get from the state, and there are a couple of nonprofits created specifically to address the needs," she said. On resources available for the homeless, she said "we're very limited to what we have in our county."

Cape Assist offers prevention and treatment services for substance abuse and related issues. However, Faldetta said, they get requests for assistance from people without permanent living situations.

"We get a lot of calls

'I'm just really excited to hear about what people have done and to get a starting point for a more long-term conversation (about homelessness). I'm very optimistic about what this community can do.'

—Katie Faldetta, executive director, Cape Assist

around the first frost, the first snow, from a lot of people who are identifying that their situation is not working for them, either they are living outside or living somewhere that is not supposed to be a shelter," she said.

The public and the Cape May County Board of Chosen Freeholders discussed homelessness in the county during a meeting Dec. 11, as reported in the Ocean City Sentinel and Cape May Star and Wave newspapers.

Representatives from Cape Hope, an organization that works with the homeless and people who identified themselves as being homeless, spoke during the meeting.

Denise South, director of Cape Hope, said during the meeting that 43 percent of Cape Hope's clientele are not living in the woods and do not have substance-abuse issues. She said they are single parents with children.

She said the way to end homelessness is by giving someone a home.

During the meeting, Freeholder Director Gerald Thornton said the county has \$200,000 available to

support a nonprofit organization that has a viable plan and a location for a homeless shelter. Thornton also estimated that Cape May County spent nearly \$101,000 last year on the homeless with block grant money.

Cape May County does not have a homeless shelter but offers vouchers to motels for those who are in need. During the meeting, Thornton said single individuals are not given vouchers. Instead, they must use warming centers.

Freeholder Jeffrey Pierson said the county used to receive about \$65,000 in funds from the state.

"The state has cut off those funds, so what we have done, we have taken that \$65,000 out of our budget and have worked with each of the municipalities to identify areas within their municipality that they can shelter their people on Code Blue nights," Pierson said.

A Code Blue Alert is a statewide initiative that allows authorities to take homeless adults to shelter programs with available beds when temperatures drop below freezing.

Warming centers are also opened during Code Blue Alerts.

During the meeting, Pierson also said that in 2014, the county housed 306 homeless persons and that number decreased to 119 in 2017.

A member of the public, however, disputed those numbers.

According to the 2014 NJ Counts report, on Jan. 28, 2014, 306 people were experiencing homelessness in Cape May County and six people were identified as chronically homeless.

In the meeting, Dana Gilroy, who said she was living in her car, said she visited the county Social Services office many times. She said she was also turned down multiple times because she has used her lifetime limit.

Michael Hale, who also spoke during the meeting, said he was eligible for rental assistance but that he could not find a landlord who would accept it. The available properties that accept it were full, he said.

Faldetta said that they are probably "very far from answers" but that "you never get an answer if you don't start asking questions."

To find local shelters or assist those who are homeless, call 211 or (877) 652-1148.

Those interested in attending the forum can RSVP to Natalia@capeassist.org or call (609) 522-5960.

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DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
16	3:15	3:35	9:29	9:25
17	4:12	4:36	10:29	10:21
18	5:08	5:34	11:26	11:16
19	6:01	6:29		12:19
20	6:53	7:22	12:10	1:11
21	7:44	8:14	1:04	2:02
22	8:35	9:07	1:58	2:52
23	9:26	10:00	2:52	3:42

MOON PHASES

Full moon, Jan. 21 • last quarter, Jan. 27

County urges owners to get rabies vaccinations for pets

CAPE MAY COURT HOUSE — "The best way to avoid potential exposure to rabies is to vaccinate your dogs and cats," Freeholder Jeff Pierson said. "An encounter with a potentially rabid animal can be fatal for your pet — particularly if your pet is not currently vaccinated — and puts your family in danger of being exposed to rabies."

County residents are advised to take precau-

tions when coming into contact with wild animals, particularly raccoons. Rather than approach a wild animal, it is advised to call animal control for assistance.

"Rabies is a fatal disease in humans and any animal bite should be taken seriously," Health Officer Kevin Thomas said.

The rabies virus is transmitted via the saliva of animals that are infected with the virus. Anyone bitten by an animal should wash the wound, seek medical attention immediately and notify the Cape May County Department of Health and their municipal animal control agency. Anyone exposed to a rabid or suspected rabid animal must receive rabies shots as soon as possible to prevent the disease. If a pet has contact with a wild animal, its owner should

contact a veterinarian and the Department of Health right away.

State law requires all dogs 7 months and older to be licensed with the owner's municipality; rabies vaccination is a requirement for licensing. Most municipalities also have requirements for cats. Many municipalities hold free or low-cost rabies vaccination clinics; rabies vaccine is also available from local veterinarians. Upcoming municipal rabies clinics include (call your municipality to confirm):

— 1 to 3 p.m. Jan. 19, Shore Veterinary Animal Hospital, 73 Hope Corson Road, Upper Township
— 1 to 3 p.m. Jan. 26, 571 Petersburg Road in Dennis Township
— 10 a.m. to noon Jan. 26, Fifth Street Firehouse,

Ocean City

— 2 to 3 p.m. Feb. 2, Public Works Garage, 400 W. Mechanic St., Cape May Court House

— 1 to 3 p.m. Feb. 16, Shore Veterinary Animal Hospital, 73 Hope Corson Road, Upper Township

— 1 to 2 p.m. Feb. 23, 901 Atlantic Ave., North Wildwood

— 5 to 6 p.m. March 5, Cape May Fire Hall, 712 Franklin St., Cape May

— 10 a.m. to noon March 9, Woodbine Ambulance Building, DeHirsch Avenue, Woodbine

— 9 to 10 a.m. March 23, Old Public School, 4501 Park Road, Sea Isle City

— 9 to 11 a.m. April 13, Public Works, 770 Seashore Road, Lower Township

— 2 to 3 p.m. May 18, Public Works Garage, 400 W. Mechanic St., Cape May Court House

For more information on animal rabies, visit nj.gov/health/cd/topics/rabies.shtml.

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SUNDAY, MAY 5

3 PM

Teri Hislop, *flute*, and Friends

Light refreshments follow the performances. Freewill offerings for community outreach gratefully appreciated.

ALL ARE WELCOME!



Cape May Star & Wave

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