Each winter, there are many evenings – even in St. Louis – when temperatures drop below 22 degrees. Most of us just throw an extra blanket on our bed or turn up the thermostat a few degrees and the extreme temperatures don’t phase us.

For someone who is homeless and sleeps on the streets or in an abandoned building, those dips in temperatures can mean the difference – literally – between life and death.

About 10 years ago, a homeless gentleman died due to the extreme cold. This tragedy set into motion the St. Louis Winter Outreach Team (WO) to ensure that this would never happen again. Founded by a social worker, today the WO has over 100 volunteers that meet year round to prepare for the extreme winter temperatures.

This year, there are 9 emergency shelters in the St. Louis area that will be active when temperatures dip below 22. WO volunteers shuttle individuals to each of the emergency shelters open that specific evening. Once at the shelter, additional WO volunteers greet each individual, giving them something warm to eat and drink and also warm, dry outerwear if needed. Based on last year’s need, the WO team estimates that they will need approximately 5,000 pair of heavy socks, 2,000 blankets/sleeping bags, 800 hats, and 700 pairs of gloves.

Washington University is partnering with the WO Team in a variety of ways this winter. Please read the other side for ways that you can get involved.

For more about the Winter Outreach Team or to sign up to get involved!

LuAnn (Lu) Oros
Community Consultant for Hunger and Homelessness
Community Service Office
luann.oros@wustl.edu

Drop-In Hours
Thursdays 12-1 p.m.
Community Service Office
DUC 150, by the fireplace
Winter Outreach

Volunteer Opportunities

1. Volunteers are Needed at 9 Emergency shelters operated by the WO Team. There are 9 shelters located in the general downtown St. Louis area. Each night of the week one of the shelters is open when temps are 22 or below, so you can volunteer on whatever evening is convenient for you. Volunteer shifts are from 4 - 6p.m. or 6 - 8p.m. Please contact Lu Oros for more information.

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314.935.9659

2. We are encouraging all students, faculty and staff to consider holding a Warm Winter Wear Drive to collect heavy socks, gloves, hats, & scarves for the WO team. Heavy, warm socks are always needed. If your feet are cold and wet, then your entire body stays cold.

Please deliver your collections any time before January 31 to the Community Service Office (DUC 150, by the fireplace

3. Food donations for the WO Team are also needed and can include: granola bars, breakfast pastries, cracker sandwich snacks, juice boxes, and individually packaged cocoa or tea. You can learn more about this year’s WO Food Crew at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/STLWOFoodCrew/

5. Interested students, faculty and staff are also encouraged to volunteer as part of the Winter Outreach Team. Volunteers go with experienced outreach and social workers in teams of 3 – 4 to find people who remain outside because of choice or because the emergency shelters have no vacancies. You will need your own transportation to meet at Mokabe’s Coffee House, at the corner of Arsenal and South Grand Avenue in south St. Louis. WO teams go out every night of the week that temperatures are below 22 degrees and you do not need to sign up beforehand. Teams meet at 6:30 p.m. where they load up vehicles with supplies (stored at Mokabe’s), hot drinks and food and then follow maps to make certain that all known individuals on the streets are cared for.