

Bishop Corps opens as shelter

When you're sleeping in your bed and a storm comes through in the middle of the night, it can be disturbing. When you're outside on the streets, it's a rude awakening.

These thoughts weighed on Bishop Corps (California) Officer Lieutenant Sherry Hooper's heart, and moved her to act. Recent winter weather in the Eastern Sierras including rain, snow and nights dipping well beyond the freezing point made life on the street uninhabitable for those experiencing homelessness. To make things worse, the 3,700-person community of Bishop didn't have a place for them to go.



So Hooper listened to her heart, and opened up the corps building as a shelter. Since it opened, it's averaged 13 people each night—and Hooper's running the operation herself, with occasional outside help dropping in so she can go home to shower.

"The concept is put yourself in their shoes," Hooper said. "Would you want to be out there?"

When conditions include heavy winds and temperatures in the teens, Hooper opens the corps. When weather gets better, she closes the shelter. Lately, she said the schedule has been four days of open shelter before she closes for better weather, only to open again several days later.

"It's definitely something I'm not going to stop doing," Hooper said. "There is no other unless somebody else takes it upon themselves to do one, but currently nobody else will. I get the phone calls when the weather goes bad. They're calling me, 'Are you going to open up for shelter?'"

Hooper said the health department, the police and another social services agency have called to ask if she'll open for the night. The Bishop Corps is currently the only place to go, and the people who come to spend the night are thankful for it.

"First and foremost they're very grateful that they have a place and they're very respectful," Hooper said. "These are the same folks that we work with on Sundays [for breakfast] so they know me, we know them, we have that mutual respect. I feel very safe I know that all is going to be OK."

When guests come to the shelter, they watch movies on Netflix, put puzzles together and enjoy fellowship. The guests often stay for the corps' Sunday morning breakfast and the worship service

directly after.

Beyond meeting physical needs, the shelter has served as a way for those who wouldn't typically come to the corps to be welcomed in.

"There is a couple in the group that I know they wouldn't stay otherwise," Hooper said. "They would never come on their own if we didn't have the shelter."

One of these people is a man who is Native American and had his own way of worship.

"This gentleman is asking about who's who, as in which way to follow. What is the right god? He's trying to decipher and he's an adult and he's been raised in the native culture," Hooper said. "Just for him to be able to cry on my shoulders and I prayed for him at the same time. Just that seed being planted and him trying to figure it out. The Lord just opened that for him to be here at that time."