

Stamford Opens New Shelter As Homelessness Rises and Temperatures Plummet

By Evan Simko-Bednarski

STAMFORD -- Just as the weather began to turn toward the freezing point, Inspirica, the Stamford homeless service organization, opened a new wing of emergency housing on Wednesday.

"How many of you were cold on your way in here?" asked [Jason Shaplen](#), Inspirica's CEO, as he stood at the end of a hallway at the organization's Franklin Street property addressing a crowd of press, city officials and members of Inspirica's board.

"We have a homeless crisis," he went on, "and the numbers show that."

Chronic homelessness has risen by 72 percent in Stamford in the past five years, Shaplen said. Standing with Mayor [David Martin](#) and Connecticut Housing Commissioner [Evonne Klein](#), he praised city and state officials for providing Inspirica with the financial support to double its emergency housing capacity.

Geared toward early intervention, the 21 beds of the new wing are aimed at keeping struggling families from falling deeper into poverty. Nine families currently live in the shelter.

Even with the additional wing, he said, his organization will run with a 30-60 family waiting list. Families might remain on that list for up to six months.

In October, the state's 211 service began a "coordinated access" initiative, which, in part means that all shelters throughout the state have access to the same wait-list, in an effort to reduce wait times. Struggling families are encouraged to call 211.

The expansion is being funded by the [Connecticut Department](#) of Housing, which has awarded a grant of \$186,000 to Inspirica under the Community Investment Act to cover the first year of operations. An additional \$135,000 was granted to run the organization's Jumpstart Career Program.

Also announced on Wednesday, Inspirica, in partnership with the city, will begin running an overnight warming center. It will operate on the coldest nights and supplement the [Government Center's](#) daytime-only warming center.

"It will quite literally save lives," said Shaplen.

To view the article online, please visit: <http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/local/article/Stamford-opens-new-shelter-as-homelessness-rises-5905033.php>