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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community Weather Overflow Shelter Announces Needs for Next Winter

CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA – The Community Overflow Weather Shelter System (COWSS) has released its list of needs for the 2018-19 winter season, including a facility that is near downtown.

In addition to a facility near downtown, the collaborative group is looking for volunteers to join the planning committee and helpers to set up and take down the facility at the beginning and end of the season. Donations of cash and goods are needed, including cots, bedding, cleaning supplies and transportation or access to a van.

“Any and all support is welcomed,” says Phoebe Trepp whose agency Willis Dady Homeless Services provides staffing for the overflow shelter. “Our budget this year was a total of \$59,000 with a cost of \$11.54 per night, per person. This budget allowed the community to provide a safe place from the elements every night of the winter. In addition lunch was provided on Sundays, a day when very few resources are available in the community.”

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 - 308 men (66%)
 - 147 women (31%)
 - 15 children (3%)
 - This is an increase from 2016-17 when 321 unduplicated individuals were served
- 63% stayed for a couple of nights and departed without seeking other services. COWSS served as a place while they made longer-term arrangements outside the shelter system.
- 23% were regulars who choose not to (or were unable to) enter other shelters. Reasons why someone may not be able to enter a regular shelter include:
 - Poor past behavior posing a safety concern (i.e. threats of harm to others)
 - Active substance use
 - Shelters they are eligible to access are full (i.e. men-only or women-only shelters)

- The average temperature over the 122 nights was 18° with a low of -18° F. These temperatures are low enough to be lethal, to cause frostbite, or to result in burns (from fires started to keep people warm).

The Overflow Shelter is a harm-reduction model to keep people safe and out of life-threatening elements. It is a highly collaborative project that pools and leverages existing community resources providing staff, coordination, transportation and equipment.

The Shelter draws on existing community services to provide case management support that helped a number of people staying at the shelter find better housing solutions. More than **2 in 4 did not need further services**, An additional **1 in 4 are now housed or in a housing program**.

The Overflow shelter fills a gap during the winter in that it is a low barrier environment, allowing persons struggling with mental health and substance abuse issues to stay safe from the elements.

“Even though regular shelters were full on many of these winter nights, we do not need another shelter in this community,” says J’Nae Peterman of Waypoint Services. “Through outreach by a number of community agencies, we have learned that there are some folks who simply do not want to enter shelter and receive services unless it becomes a life or death situation. Once the weather is better, they go back to their preferred sleeping arrangements.”

The Community Winter Overflow Shelter is a collaborative effort among many agencies and volunteers, including Abbe Center, Catholic Worker House, Catherine McAuley Center, Cedar Rapids Police Department, First Lutheran Church, First Presbyterian Church, Green Square Meals, Harm Reduction Coalition, Linn County, Neighborhood Transportation Services, Waypoint Services and Willis Dady Homeless Services and others.

Interested volunteers should contact one of the following: Waypoint Services, 319-365-1458; Catholic Worker House, 319-362-9041 or Willis Dady Homeless Services, 319-362-7555.

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