

## Homeless shelter sits empty and cold

*The Beattyville Enterprise, Nov. 20, 2014*

People shivering on park benches and huddled under cardboard in a major city is the image most people have of the homeless. The Washington Post reported Monday that the National Center for Family Homelessness says that almost one in 30 children experience homelessness, and the rate of child homelessness in Kentucky is the worst in the country.

While that is all too true, it is also true that Lee and Owsley counties have a homeless problem and there is no room in the inn.

Wilma Kelley, executive director of Beattyville Housing, says that a day does not go by that her office receives at least one call from a homeless person or someone wanting to help.

Her office has helped approximately 150 people with a homeless issue in the two counties over the past two years.

Not all of them are homeless, she says. Some are almost there. They need help with rent or utilities. That is homeless prevention, Kelley says.

However, there are far too many that have already lost their home.

Lee County Public Aid Coordinator Lisa Moore says that she dealt with five such people on the day before cold weather was about to hit.

"If a person becomes homeless they need to come to me through the (county) judge/executive's office," she said in a recent interview.

"We get at least five new people a week," she adds.

The emergency shelter building located in West Beattyville looks complete from the outside, but the proposed temporary home for the homeless is cold and unfinished inside. There is no electricity or heat. There is also no plumbing.

"Construction had to be stopped," Kelley said, "because the code enforcement office said so."

"If we can get the plans approved, we could get the funds from churches and other places to complete the building."

Kelley received a July 1 letter from State Plan Reviewer Amy L. Eveler saying, "Construction of the project shall not begin until you receive authorization from this office. If construction has started, you shall cease until the authorization to proceed is issued."

Eveler said in her letter that, "Corrected plans shall be submitted to this office as soon as possible. If corrected plans are not received by January 3, 2015, this office will consider the application for permit void. Once the application for permit has become void, the plans on record will be destroyed. Should you wish to construct this project after the application is void, you may do so by resubmitting the plans and fee through the normal plan submission process."

There are then 13 deficiencies noted in the plans, down from 30 cited in a November 27, 2013 letter. Only three of the deficiencies are in both letters, which means 10 new ones have been added. They range from assurance that the Kentucky Workers' Compensation and Unemployment Insurance Law be included to "door handles, pulls, latches, and

locks shall not require tight grasping, tight pinching or twisting of the wrist to operate.”

Work on the building has primarily been done by volunteers, starting several years ago with Habitat for Humanity.

Plans have been put together also by volunteers.

And, while the building sits, empty and cold, homeless people in Lee and Owsley counties must look for a bench or cardboard.

The need for an emergency shelter became apparent Monday when a power outage hit Beattyville and parts of Lee County.

Lee County Rescue Squad Captain Greg Angel said that one family lost heat and had to be temporarily housed in the squad’s building, which is next to the uncompleted shelter.

He said there is a list of 25 or so families that could need help under such circumstances.

“We don’t have the room for all of them,” he said.

He said that 911 Dispatch had helped during the emergency by keeping him posted of road conditions in case people needed assistance.

The Enterprise contacted Gov. Steve Beshear’s office Tuesday for comment on the status of the project.

That office forwarded the inquiry to the Division of Building Code Enforcement.

Dick Brown, executive director of the Office of Communications and Public Outreach, responded in an email concerning the two project requests from Kelley, “...neither of which was granted due to numerous deficiencies in the plans that were submitted.”

## **Homeless in Lee County**

He is the face of homelessness in Lee County.

Alex Dezanett can be seen pushing his used-to-be motorized, small wheel bike around Beattyville. It is loaded with all of his worldly possessions.

The 40-year-old native of Toledo, OH recently sat down with The Beattyville Enterprise to talk about how he came to be homeless and in Lee County.

How old are you?

“I was born in 1971.”

What date?

“I don’t keep up with things like that.”

Where are you from?

“I was born and raised in Toledo.”

What about school?

“I dropped out in the 11th grade.”

Why?

“I wasn’t doing too good, and I didn’t like it.”

So what did you do?

"I got a job with a pallet company, but I got into an argument with the boss."

What led you to homelessness?

"I couldn't get a job, so I just became homeless."

Are you happy?

"Sort of."

Do you want better?

"Yeah. I would do work. Right now I pick up cans, and whatever scraps the Lord leads me to."

What do you eat?

"I get Ramen noodles from the dollar store. Some people give me food."

What do you keep on your bike?

"Everything. I have clothes, blankets, a pillow."

Alex came to Beattyville to stay with his father, Donald, who recently lost his home and became homeless. That sent Alex back out on the streets.

When talking with the people at Beattyville Housing, he told them that all he needs is a tent.

While still being interviewed at the agency's office, a worker came in the room and told Alex that she was going to Walmart in Jackson. The store had agreed to give a two-person tent.

Finally, Alex has a home.