

# Lynn shelter wants to provide more than beds

By **Cyrus Moulton**  
ITEM STAFF

LYNN — The Lynn Adult Emergency Shelter may not be a place most people would choose to sleep — but that doesn't mean that it can't be welcoming and comfortable.

So, the shelter is asking the community for help raising about \$10,000 to buy new beds and mattresses as part of a larger project to gussy up the Willow Street building.

"It may seem silly to people because it's a shelter but (we) don't want it to look like an institutional place," said Marjorie St. Paul, director of the Lynn Adult Emergency Shelter. "We don't want it to look ugly; we want it to be welcoming so people don't have to come in here and be so unhappy."

St. Paul credited board member Alison Brookes, M.D., with spearheading the effort to make the shelter — housed in a

dark basement with cinderblock walls, linoleum-tile floors and low ceilings — more aesthetically welcoming. With assistance from General Electric, local businesses and churches, volunteers are adding new layers of paint, new tiling along a counter where residents congregate for coffee, new flooring, artwork, bookshelves and other improvements to a space that Brookes called "in desperate need of rehabilitation."

"They try to keep it clean and do the best they can," Brookes said of the staff and many residents of the emergency shelter. "It's just old."

Brookes explained that the government has shifted its approach to combating homelessness with a focus on expanding affordable and transitional housing opportunities rather than devoting money to the more traditional homeless shelters.

Brookes said this tactic is totally reasonable and well-intentioned, but "the only thing wrong with it is it doesn't work."

The supply of affordable and transitional housing can't keep up with the demand — especially in a region with as expensive housing as Boston. Meanwhile, emergencies, family events and inadequate resources for case management and mental-health care ensure there will always be a need for an emergency shelter. But these facilities have fallen into disrepair.

"You have to have a place that is a proper refuge,"

Brookes said, describing current conditions at the shelter as "unhygienic" and "decrepit."

And one of the biggest needs is the need for new beds. St. Paul said the current beds came from a former nunnery more than a decade ago and are extra-long as opposed to twin beds, meaning they require special mattresses and linens. But that's if they have a mattress and linens — periodic outbreaks of bedbugs have forced many of the mattresses to be replaced with a sleeping mat or two.

John's Furniture on Union Street has offered the shelter 44 beds, mattresses and bedbug protectors for a discounted price of \$9,575. But the money has to be up front. And the goal is to get them in when the new floor tiles arrive, St. Paul said.

She said the aesthetic improvements may not be an extremely expensive change; but small improvements can have big impacts. One Christmas, Brookes and a friend bought quilts and linens and put them on all the shelter beds while the residents were away at a group dinner.

The residents were thrilled.

"It was amazing what a small thing like that can mean," St. Paul said.

To donate to the cause, please visit the Lynn Shelter Association at <http://www.lsahome.org/donate.html> or on Facebook.

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