



ITEM PHOTOS / OWEN O'ROURKE

Aaron Falagan, left, had heard of Marjorie St. Paul, the director of the Lynn Shelter Association, right, but never got to meet her until Wednesday.

Shelter from the streets



Cold weather sharpens call to revive Lynn day program

LYNN

By THOR JOURGENSEN

THE DAILY ITEM

Calls and complaints about homeless individuals loitering and engaging in “anti-social behaviors” could be reduced or halted if a downtown daytime activity program reopens, Lynn Shelter Association representatives said Wednesday.

A \$178,000 federal cut shut down the Willow Street program in March, leaving an estimated 60 people who sleep in the basement shelter at Liberty and Washington streets without a place to go during the day.

Shelter Director Marjorie St. Paul said the day program shutdown prompted calls, beginning late last spring, from business owners, North Shore Community College representatives and public library workers about loitering homeless individuals.

“Anyone, homeless or not, is welcome at the library but it becomes a problem when they are sleeping or bathing in the bathroom,” said Chief Librarian Theresa Hurley.

She said police at the request of library employees

Justin Webber, a father of three, said he came to the shelter in March because he had “no one to help” with problems in his life.

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conducted “walkthroughs” in the North Common Street building starting in the spring. St. Paul said the day program’s closing also sparked complaints about individuals loitering in the Market Street commuter garage.

The closing left men and women like Justin Webber, who said he has no place to live and very little money, with nowhere to go between 7:30 a.m. and 4 p.m.

“They told us, ‘find some place to go.’ I would hide out at friends,” Webber said.

The father of three said he came to the shelter in March because he had “no one to help” with problems in his life. Fellow shelter resident Robert Mothersell has his own place to live now but he said the day program gave him a chance to use a computer to find housing.

“It was awesome — you were out of the

cold,” he said.

Deputy Police Chief Leonard Desmarais said no “crime uptick” followed the day program closing, but he said “people are now standing on corners — sometimes their behavior might be considered anti-social by others.”

Like street advocate Pat Byrne, Desmarais is familiar with downtown streets and people who live, work or are homeless downtown. He has patrolled streets in the city’s center for 14 years.

“I know a lot of folks by name,” Desmarais said.

St. Paul said reopening the day program with its counseling, job and housing assistance help for the homeless is a goal that could be partially reached if the shelter secured \$25,000 to partially reopen the program during the cold weather months.

“I’d like to have the city eventually see this as part of their responsibility to

include in the budget,” St. Paul said.

Mayor Judith Flanagan Kennedy in a text message Wednesday said money is not currently available to revive the day program. She said she will review the city budget once major year-end expenses and money sources become clearer “... and see what, if any, excess money is available.”

Cathy Boudreau has lived in the shelter since January and said the day program’s revival might help her continue a job search that stalled after the program closed. Day program workers taught her to use a computer after she came to the shelter in January.

Hurley said library workers also reached out to help homeless individuals use library computers.

“It was so sad seeing people carrying everything they own,” she said.

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