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**SACRAMENTO  
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Ending Homelessness. Starting Fresh.

**November 24, 2015**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Winter Sanctuary Opens for 2015-16**

*Area congregations partner with Sacramento Steps Forward to shelter homeless single adults through March 2016*

SACRAMENTO, CA – Winter Sanctuary, the rotating winter shelter program hosted by area congregations in partnership with Sacramento Steps Forward (SSF), opened as scheduled on Monday, November 23, 2015. Winter Sanctuary, operating since 2010, is Sacramento County's primary winter shelter for homeless single adults, and hosts up to 100 individuals each night, beginning on the Monday before Thanksgiving and continuing through March 31, 2016. This year, nearly 30 congregations located throughout Sacramento County have volunteered to host Winter Sanctuary, providing meals, activities, a warm place to sleep, and hospitality to guests.

Each day, Winter Sanctuary guests gather at a location near downtown Sacramento and are transported to the night's participating congregation site. Congregation volunteers serve Winter Sanctuary guests dinner and many also offer other activities and services before guests turn in for the night. The next morning, volunteers provide a light breakfast before guests board shuttles to return downtown. Local congregations and faith-based groups have already stepped up to host 100 nights of the program, however, SSF needs to fill 30 remaining nights between December and March.

Consistent with its mission to end homelessness in Sacramento, SSF is increasingly focused on assisting Winter Sanctuary guests with accessing permanent housing, so that this is the last winter that shelter is needed. Over the course of the season, Winter Sanctuary may serve as many as 500 individuals. In keeping with the housing-first philosophy that governs Sacramento Steps Forward's work, SSF is also working to reduce barriers to shelter by exploring partnerships with animal care agencies, including Front Street Animal Shelter, Sacramento SPCA, Sacramento County Animal Shelter, and Sacramento Loaves & Fishes, to accommodate pets within the Winter Sanctuary program. Many individuals cite pet ownership as a major impediment to entering shelter. While no kennel and veterinary services have yet been made available, SSF and its partners hope to announce solutions for pet owners within the next few weeks.

In previous years, Sacramento Steps Forward has partnered with the community to raise funds for the program. This year, in part due to advocacy from the faith community led by Sacramento Area Congregations Together, Sacramento County has allocated \$260,000 to cover the administrative costs of the program. This support will allow the congregations to focus on recruiting volunteers and supplying food and other items to Winter Sanctuary guests.

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Additional support from Bank of America, Sierra Health Foundation, and the Kelly Foundation will be used to expand services within Winter Sanctuary, including a dedicated homeless services navigator and additional program staff.

The City of Sacramento has also partnered with Sacramento Steps Forward to manage a motel voucher program for families experiencing homelessness this winter, which is expected to begin on December 1<sup>st</sup>. Motel voucher access is managed through SSF's outreach team and some shelters. More details will be available later this week.

According to the 2015 Sacramento City & Incorporated Cities Homeless Count, nearly 1,000 individuals lack access to shelter on any given night. The efforts of area congregations, homeless services providers, the City of Sacramento and Sacramento County, along with the financial support of the community are essential to ensuring that people experiencing homelessness have safe, stable shelter for our cold, wet winter months.

For more information about Winter Sanctuary, visit: <http://sacramentostepsforward.org/our-programs/wintersanctuary/>

Sacramento Steps Forward is the nonprofit agency leading the Sacramento region's effort to end homelessness. For more information, please contact Maya Wallace, External Affairs Director, at [mwallace@sacstepsforward.org](mailto:mwallace@sacstepsforward.org) or call (916) 993-7702.

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