**Aroostook County Emergency Management Agency**

**“Developing a Warming Center”**

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**Introduction**

The following is information that was gathered and compiled from Aroostook County Emergency Management(AKEMA) officials, The American Red Cross, and local volunteers. This document has been designed to provide information and a guide on how to develop a warming center in any community in Aroostook County. Each community within the county has different needs; therefore the process of starting a center will pose different challenges for each community in the County. The information within this packet can be applied to all of the communities in Aroostook County, Maine.

**How to Begin a Warming Center in your Community**

Living in northern Maine we all know that winter can bring us some extreme weather conditions. In some cases we go through more than one extreme condition or have to deal with it for an extended period of time. Developing a warming center in your community could prove to be the vital resource that your community members may need during the extreme cold of the winter months here in Aroostook County. A Warming Center is a place for residences in the community to go for a few hours of throughout the day. The Warming Center does not need to be open 24/7 in most cases. The idea behind developing a Warming Center is to help residents during a significant winter event, such as a long snow storm, ice storm, or extended power outage.

There are a few things we need to think about when we determine why we need to develop a warming center in a community. First thing you need to come up with a *vision* for the center, what would you like to provide for your community member’s? Secondly we need to develop a *mission* statement to make it clear to the public who can utilize the warming center, what services will be offered, and who will be helping set up and run the center. Lastly we need to set a *goal* for the center to strive to achieve as an organization.

***Vision:*** To provide the members of a community with a warm place to come have a hot meal, enjoy company of other folks from the community, and gather up to date information on storm and recovery forecasts.

***Mission:*** To offer this service to people who are in need such as the elderly, disabled, homeless, or less fortunate families within the community.

***Goal:*** To partner with community members, church groups, local public safety agencies and other volunteer groups within the community to help minimize the burden on any singular provider and establish a safe, warm, welcoming place for community members to go to minimize the burden on them.

The main idea in mind is minimizing the stress on community members during a time of year, and possibly during or after a significant weather related event occurs, that may be difficult for some folks to get through on their own. Working with local agencies, regional, county and statewide organizations can be beneficial in many aspects. Sharing resources amongst these groups will help to keep cost minimized.

By involving multiple organizations, an investment center is shared, with each partner contributing various resources. This however, does not necessarily mean that some additional; fundraising won’t be needed. Fundraisers and grants will become very necessary in sustaining these warming center sites.

**Planning Considerations: *Host Facility***

Within your community there is a good chance that there are many adequately equipped facilities that you may be able to access as a host site for your warming center. Some common places that could be a possibility for your host location may be your local fire station or public safety building, the town hall or community center, as well as places like Elk’s and Lion’s clubs or even a Church.



**Planning Considerations: *Funding, Partnerships, Expenses***

Partnering with local agencies and church groups can be a big help in getting your Warming Center operational. Grant funding may also be available and could be a good source of assistance. Local donations from community members will benefit you as well. It is very important to keep funding in mind and plan accordingly in order to keep the Warming Center open as long as the need is present. Keep in mind the heating season may extend into April in some years so be sure to plan for this accordingly.

**Planning Considerations: *Providing Meals***

There will be numerous challenges to face when starting your Warming Center. The three biggest challenges you are going to encounter will be the cost to heat your space, the availability of receiving a dependable supply of food, and finding and managing volunteers.

Meals will be needed for your Warming Center. Depending on the hours of operation, meals will need to be carefully thought out and preplanning will need to occur. Finding and sustaining a steady, dependable supply of food will be crucial.



Focus your efforts on finding the supplies you may need in your local community. Some possible suppliers may be places such as large restaurants, grocery stores, or food service suppliers. Smaller donations will help but may not be consistent so do not rely on them. You will need to rely on your volunteers to coordinate the pick-up and drop off points for needed supplies. Keeping track of donations is also key. Quality of food and ingredients need to be thought out as well. Allergies, cooking temperatures, and stand time are things that may cause liability issues down the road if overlooked. One thing to keep in mind when selecting a facility, is that if you are going to be serving food then you must make sure that the facilities kitchen is ADA compliant. ADA compliancy is a must and should not be overlooked.

**Volunteers:**

Volunteers will play a critical role in all aspects of your Warming Shelter. Be sure not to burn out your volunteers by encouraging them to take the time they need off to have a break and focus on their own lives and family needs. The larger the pool of volunteers you have to work with, the easier it will be to alternate and prevent them from burning themselves out. The longer the Warming Center is open, the higher the rate of burn out of your volunteers will arise.

An orientation should be provided for your volunteers and the following subject areas should be covered:

1. *Safety*
2. Safety of the Volunteers that are running the shelter.
3. Safety of the folks benefiting from the shelter.
4. Safety of the building.
5. *Transportation*
6. Be sure volunteers know that providing rides for folks is not part of the shelters service.
7. Volunteers should have dependable transportation to the center
8. *The loss or damage of personal items will not be covered by the shelter*
9. *Communication is key.*

Food preparation and handling training should be developed and provided as well. Proper, safe and clean handling of food should be a very high concern.

Allow your volunteers choices and personal preference for the various tasks that will need to be done. You will have a form for different types of work that needs to be done with the shelter and throughout the operation of the shelter. These sign-up sheets will keep you organized and allow for smooth operation of the center. As the center comes to a close, a survey is recommended to be done by participants, volunteers and guests. This will assist you in future planning for the coming year.



Volunteers can do many different jobs to assist a warming center, so keeping track of who is doing what will become very important in the centers operation. Welcoming guests, snow removal, and cooking food are only some of the roles your volunteers can assist with. It is very important to have a welcoming and high spirited atmosphere amongst your volunteers within the shelter, thus helping to keep your guests comfortable and make them feel welcome.

**Positions needed for a successful and structured Warming Center:**

***Director:*** Directors will be in charge of all the volunteers and organizing supplies that will be needed. Directors will act as an administrator and address any and all issues you may face with managing volunteers. Ideally you should only need two directors.

***Volunteer Coordinators:*** Coordinators will be contacting people from the volunteer sign-up sheet to line up the volunteers for each day of operation. Good communication skills are going to be essential to a good coordinator. Two coordinators will be ideal for managing your center.

***Receptionist:*** Receptionists will welcome guests, be able to answer questions, and take care of various duties such as making sure all volunteers have name tags. We recommend making up a flyer to handout to the guests that will include rules of the center. Receptionists will be responsible for keeping count of guests, volunteers, and all finances. There should only be a need for two receptionists.

***Team A:*** Shovel/sand/salt parking areas and walkways as needed. Secure parking areas with designated signage as needed. Assist with unloading food for delivery, and opening and closing of the center as needed. This team should also be tasked with keeping the facility clean, neat, and welcoming. Simple things like setting tables and keeping a hot pot of coffee ready will make a big difference.

***Team B:*** Welcoming new arrivals and showing them around the facility. Sitting and visiting with guests is a very important role that needs to be filled as well. Offering to keep them company by playing a game, solving a puzzle, or simply just carrying on a conversation will make folks feel welcomed and comfortable. Activities may be developed as well and offered to guests, which may help entice others to join in.

***Team C:*** Meal prep, set up, and serving. A group of at least six volunteers will be needed for this task. This team will be stationed in the kitchen area of the facility.

***Team D:*** Meal Clean up. Assist guests with cleaning up their space and being sure they are satisfied with the meal. Clearing tables as needed and setting up cots if folks are wishing to rest.

***Team E:*** Washing dishes, drying and putting them away. Taking the trash to the dumpster and mopping up any messes from the meal.

***Team G:*** Sweeping the floors, mopping floors, and vacuuming carpets as needed. Tidying up the facility and grounds as needed. General assistance to other teams may be provided as needed. Making sure the facility is cleaned up after use and dismantling of the center as well.

All teams should be spaced out hourly and accordingly, depending on the need and time of day. Volunteers may also be on more than one team, however they need to be sure to take adequate time for breaks throughout their time volunteering. This will help to reduce fatigue in your volunteers. You’ll need to have a sign-up sheet with all the different teams so you know which volunteers want to be on the various teams. (see attached appendix for volunteer sign-up sheet)

**Planning Considerations*: Notifications & Publicity***

Notifying the appropriate agencies is a high priority when setting up your center. Be sure to notify AKEMA, as well as your local emergency management director and local public safety departments. Publicity is also a very important consideration for any warming center. You will need someone to write a press release, contact local newspapers and radio stations in regards to information about the warming center. This person will prove to be a very valuable resource to your center. Placing ads on your local access TV channel, on social media, and placing flyers in your community can all prove to be very beneficial to informing the public. Local community organizations can also help bring people to the center, as well as they may be able to help you find volunteers for your centers operation.



**Conclusion:**

With all of the information provided within this manual, we hope that it will prove helpful in your efforts to start a Warming Center. The appendixes are materials that may prove helpful to you as you develop your own center. Every community in Aroostook County has its own needs and challenges, so with the information in this document we hope it becomes useful to all.

***Appendix A: Volunteer Sign-up Sheet Example***

**Volunteer Sign-Up Sheet Organizational Form for the Warming Center**

**Name of the Warming Center:** Aroostook EMA Warming Center

**Location of Warming Center:** Caribou Middle School Gym

**Days Open:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, January through March

**Time of Operation:** 10AM – 4PM

**Host Organizations:** -AKEMA

-Caribou Middle School

-Local Church Group

**Orientation Meetings:** -Jan 5, 2019 @ 3PM @ AKEMA

-Feb 5, 2019 @ 3PM @ AKEMA

-Mar 5, 2019 @ 3PM @AKEMA

**Orientation of Volunteers.** Volunteers from church groups, schools, and other local community organizations will be needed.

**Next Planning Meeting:**  Monday, December 18, 2019 @ 3PM, AKEMA

**Volunteer Positions Needed: See Position Details Original Document**

Directors:

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Volunteer Coordinators:

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Receptionist:

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Team A: 9am - 11am

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Team B: 10am - 12noon

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Team C: 11am - 1pm

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Team D: 12noon – 2pm

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Team E: 12noon – 2pm

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Team F: 1pm – 4pm

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Team G: 3pm – Close

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***Appendix B: Warming Center Survey***

**Warming Center Survey**

We would like to know about your experience at the Warming Center. Please take a few minutes to fill out this survey by circling the appropriate answer. Please feel free to write any comments you may have after each question or on the back of this paper. Thank You!

1. The Warming Center provided me with a warm, safe place to stay while I lowered the heat in my home so save on my personal heating cost.

YES NO Comments:

1. The warming center served a hot meal every day the center was open.

YES NO Comments:

1. Were the meal served enjoyable and the serving size adequate for you?

YES NO Comments:

1. Was transportation to and from the center a problem for you?

YES NO Comments:

1. Do you know any people who would have come to the center if affordable transportation would have been provided?

YES NO Comments:

1. Did you participate in activities while visiting the center?

YES NO Comments:

1. Please tell us what you thought went well with your experience at the warming center:
2. Please tell us what you think could be better about the warming center:
3. Would you like to see the warming center open again next year?

YES NO Comments: