

We are all our brothers' keepers

Written by By Beth Blakeman & William Madaras Associate Editor & For the Sun
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Gallup invites community to participate in ending death by exposure

One freezing death is too many during the cold season in Gallup. As the winter season takes hold, Juliana Dooley describes the weather as cold and wet. Dooley is the behavioral health collaborative coordinator for Rehoboth McKinley Christian Health Care Services.

Dooley grew up in Gallup. She started working at RMCHCS in 2016, the year the Freezing Campaign began. The campaign was launched to prevent deaths from exposure in Gallup and McKinley County. Fueled by volunteers and hospital staff, it sends WellSpring Recovery Center and Community Work Service Program members across Gallup to distribute posters to raise awareness of exposure deaths and ways to help.

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The signs urge everyone to get involved in the effort to reach zero exposure deaths this winter.

“Watch for impaired people in the evenings. Don’t let them freeze to death. They need shelter for the night. Ignoring them is neglect,” the sign advises.

Dooley says, “In the collaborative, we have identified over 130 agencies that help in one way or another with the problems of alcoholism, and homelessness. These are agencies that are non profits, [for] profits, city, tribal, federal, state. [The] community comes forward and helps a great deal with the homeless population.”

What’s more, she points out, there is a way for every member of the community to participate in this effort. “If you see something, do something. All it takes is a phone call and a location. You don’t even have to wait for Metro’s van to arrive, you have done your part...We have zero tolerance for people dying from exposure.”

The Gallup Police Department reports that four residents died from hypothermia in 2017, and three died in 2018. So far in 2019, there have been no deaths from hypothermia reported.

Dooley says, more people are stepping up to participate in the campaign this year. Those who wish to participate can reach her directly at (505) 726-6851.

HOW IT WORKS

Dooley explains someone could be walking into a grocery store and see someone who was

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incapacitated. They would immediately know a number to call to help that person.

“The City of Gallup has stepped forward in this endeavor also, because the community service aides are very caring. They will pick up the individual and take them to a center where they can be warm and be fed and they can stay there for 72 hours or until they have their capacities about them and they can leave.”

Na Nihzhoozhi Center, Inc. Executive Director Kevin Foley says the center offers indoor comfort mats for sleeping to those needing shelter for the night. His facility can offer accommodations for up to 150 detoxing, treatment, and shelter people. He also notes that those requiring shelter will be provided breakfast.

The Gallup Police Department oversees the metro dispatch van which will assist residents needing help. Gallup Police Chief Franklin Boyd says, “Anybody can call Metro Dispatch or 911 if they observe anyone laying (sic) on the ground and obviously in need of assistance, especially during inclement weather. Skilled dispatchers are trained to quickly dispatch emergency services as well as aid and transportation to NCI, where those needing help can remain sheltered for up to 72 hours.”

“It is not uncommon for them to locate near frozen people in places they would not have been found otherwise, had they not literally walked these cold, dark and hidden areas well after midnight in freezing temperatures,” Boyd pointed out.

Metro Dispatch will launch a new dispatch software system in mid-November that will greatly assist the campaign. The system offers proximity dispatching, which maps out calls for service and officers' locations, so dispatchers can quickly match units to specific calls. It also helps identify which jurisdiction a call is in, so dispatchers know which law enforcement agency to notify.

For its part, the Gallup Chamber of Commerce is urging members to participate in the advertising campaign to prevent deaths by exposure. Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce CEO Bill Lee says, “We welcome this opportunity and urge members to post the flyers we have sent them. We are asking [that] they be prominent and posted in appropriate windows and other publicly accessible display areas in your establishment.”

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As Dooley puts it "If a relative needs help, you don't want to leave them out in the cold, that's for sure."

Call McKinley County's Metro Dispatch at (505)722-2231 for physical assistance and transportation to Gallup's detox center at the Na Nihzhoozhi Center, Inc., 2201 Boyd Ave., or 911 for a medical emergency.

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