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## BEYOND THE FOURTH THURSDAY

*The winter season is upon us, but what about the homeless?*



by [Tiamoyo Harris](#)

November 24, 2014

Fall flirted sporadically, but the weather has officially kicked fall to the curb and set winter in its place. Tank tops and flip flops are back in the closet and coats and snow boots will make its debut on campus soon. “The weather outside is frightful, but the fire is so delightful...” is the chorus of the holiday classic Let It Snow, which will be in rotation at every retail store upon the holiday season. But what about those that don’t have a choice but to endure that frightful winter weather? What about the homeless?

Thanksgiving is around the corner and Christmas is making its way for them too. Donations and community service are at its highest peak during this time of the year. Even the Washington Wizards hosted a “Backcourt Baskets” drive November 20 to distribute 400 Thanksgiving baskets to children at John H. Ketcham Elementary located in southeast DC.

Many open up their hearts to serve during the holiday’s season, but the homeless have to endure the cold longer than that. The District has stepped in and taken steps to decrease the amount of homeless people during the upcoming winter months. Still, the issue isn’t just for the government to fight. Bison too can impact and help resolve homelessness in the community.

The District officially declared hypothermia season to reign from November 3 to March 31, meaning every time the temperature falls below 32 degrees Fahrenheit, (including a wind chill), D.C. has vowed to house all those on the streets. According to the District’s FY 2014-2015 Winter Plan, the city would need to shelter 840 families during the hypothermia season. That number is up from last year, according to The Interagency Council on Homelessness, who predicted a 16 percent increase in the amount of homeless families.

The city recently took action in decreasing the amount of people without a home, particularly veterans. The United States Veterans Initiative office — the nation’s largest non-profit provider to at-risk and homeless veterans — opened its new residential facility with a ribbon-cutting ceremony October 24 in southeast. The new facility included housing for 85 veterans along with round-the-clock residential assistance and employment and assistance training. Another facility to help homeless veterans had its groundbreaking November 10. The John and Jill Ker Conway Residence, which would be the District’s first permanent supportive housing residence, will include 60 units for veterans.

Making sure those who once served our country have a place to put their head at night has been a priority for the city, but veterans are still only a proportion of all the city’s homeless. Some without a roof over their head may stay at D.C. General Hospital. This shelter contains 288 bed units, and the exit rate is 63 families a month as of August. However, the capacity is nearing and the shelter isn’t the safest. Eight-year-old Relisha Rudd disappeared from D.C. General on March 19 and has yet to be found. With that being said, the city has made plans to house families in an additional 260 motel rooms during this hypothermia season. Mayor Gray proposed a plan to permanently shut down D.C. General by 2015 and house families in various shelters across the District.

If or until that day comes, Bison have the power to make an impact on those housed at D.C. General, which is located right off the Stadium-Armory Metro stop on the Blue and Orange lines. Through the Homeless Children's Playtime Project, which serves D.C. General, students can volunteer weekly with a six-month commitment. Student can also volunteer at different holidays and special events as well as donate food and clothes to the center.

Another company that serves over 200 individuals every day is Thrive D.C. It's located right in the basement of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church (a seven-minute walk from Columbia Heights Metro). The center feeds those in need twice a day while providing intensive job training, access to computers, laundry and showers. Students can help prepare meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as volunteer in the computer lab in one hour increments.

One place that is also doing its part to assist the homeless in D.C. is the Community for the Creative Non-Violence (CCNV). The center has a 1,350-bed Federal City Shelter and has provided over 5,000,000 meals to the less fortunate in the past 30 years. The mission of the non-profit is to ensure that the rights of the homeless are not infringed upon, and that every person has access to life's basic essentials-food, shelter, clothing and medical care. Currently, the center needs holiday volunteer coordinators, hypothermia volunteers, a volunteer coordinator and a fundraising coordinator.

For over 44 years, So Other's May Eat (SOME) has served the District's poor and homeless residents. In 2013, it provided support and care to 427 homeless adults with chronic mental illness. SOME is an interfaith, community-based organization that exists to help the poor and homeless of our nation's capital through serving food and providing clothing and health care. Many Bison have participated in early morning food drives with this organization, but tutoring and mentoring opportunities are available as well.

New Hope Ministries and St. Luke's Mission Center, both located in northwest, along with New Covenant Baptist Church, located in southwest, are also shelters for the homeless that operate during the hypothermia season.

Homelessness is a nationwide issue that continuously affects the people of the District of Columbia. The problem is not the woman asking for change outside of McDonald's on Georgia Avenue or the man sleeping at the Shaw-Howard Metro stop. The problem stimulates from what is or is not being done to assist them. Slowly but surely, the District is attempting to resolve this problem. Right now, students have an ample amount of opportunities to volunteer and contribute not only financially or with canned food, but also with their time. Many of these organizations are in walking distance or a metro-ride away from campus.

This winter season, remember that there are going to be people that need a meal and a place to stay even after the holidays have come and gone. If you ever see anyone suffering from hypothermia in D.C., dial the number 1- 800-535-7252.

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