

Testimony

I am Brenda Bergsrud, Executive Director of Amachi Mentoring and Lake Region Community Shelter in Devils Lake. I want to stress the importance of providing shelter to those in need and the lack of shelter for juveniles.

I want to share ONE story of many situations we have had at the shelter in Devils Lake. A young man, age 17 presented himself and asked to stay. We are not able to house anyone under the age of 18. This child is attending high school, working at a fast-food restaurant, and wanted to stay in Devils Lake for these two reasons. He currently is under the care of his grandparents. I phoned the police and he begged for them to take him to jail so he would have a place to stay. He told us repeatedly that he could not stay with his grandparents as they "use", his mother also uses and his father is nowhere to be found. He repeated that he just wants to do good. Our hearts were broken, mine and the police officers who took him to CPS. These are the situations that keep us going and keep me up at night; where is he now?

This is a scenario that the shelter staff encounters weekly. WE NEED HELP for these young people wanting to break the vicious cycle they are living in. Keep in mind that a suppressant for hunger is meth. Meth is readily available to these children at a young age. Parents are no longer caring for their children, causing homelessness and hunger. The domino effect of substance use is affecting more and more at a young age. We need to support these children for their sake and our communities.

The Lake Region Shelter is at capacity nearly every day. Every day we turn someone away. Devils Lake offers employment, and housing so it is attracting from neighboring communities besides the transient population who are passing through. Shelters need direct funding and not funding funneled through other programs. Some programs that are very helpful have an application process that can take weeks, this is not helpful to those who are in immediate need of services. The cost of operating a shelter and providing services such as assistance with employment, transportation, and finding housing is expensive but very much needed.

Thank you for your consideration to support the youth and homeless in North Dakota.

Brenda Bergsrud