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Students spend night outdoors to raise awareness of homelessness



Lucas Peterka/Contributing Photographer

Students gather at Hinman College on Friday night and gear up to spend the night outside in an effort to educate students for National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week.

Sixth-annual 'Sleep Out' held at Hinman College amid wind, cold temperatures

By MELANIE GULBAS AND LAKHSMI CHATTERJEE - NOVEMBER 25, 2019

Giving up their Friday night plans, some Binghamton University students chose to sleep outdoors this weekend in an effort to raise awareness of homelessness in the Binghamton area.

The sixth-annual “Sleep Out” was hosted by BU in partnership with the Binghamton Rescue Mission, a nonprofit organization that provides housing to individuals facing homelessness or those at risk of being homeless. The event was sponsored by Hinman College, and started Friday night on Nov. 22, lasting until 6 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 23.

Throughout the night, the students participated in a variety of activities, including making holiday cards for the residents of the Binghamton Rescue Mission, poetry readings on the topic of homelessness, a post-midnight film viewing and conversations around a fire.

Jessica Stanis, director of the Binghamton Rescue Mission, said the timing of the event coincided with National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week and the beginning of the colder months, which helps participants understand the reality of what the homeless population endures. Since she started participating in the event three years ago, Stanis said she has seen more students support the sleep out each year.

“Last year we had snow and this year we have lots of wind and it is pretty cold, but these students are motivated and extremely involved, both on campus and off campus, with our organization,” Stanis said.

Stanis said the volunteers help throughout the year by making meals, baking desserts and raising money for the Binghamton Rescue Mission. She said the Binghamton Rescue Mission is more than just a home and provides help with food, clothing, transportation and case management for homeless individuals.

“We help those we serve become healthy and productive members of our community,” Stanis said. “By that I mean we help them get jobs, maintain their sobriety, reconnect with their families, we help them work toward their goals.”

Lexi Murman, an organizer of the event and a senior majoring in political science, said the goal is to get more students involved and to give back to the community as much as they can.

“We just want to raise awareness of the homeless population and what we can do to help them, whether it be through getting connected with [organizations] like the Binghamton Rescue Mission [or] volunteering at soup kitchens or donating money, whatever you can,” Murman said.

This is the fourth year Murman participated in the event, and she said every year organizers see between 80 to 120 participants. Last year, even with the snowy weather conditions, they had 80 participants.

“It’s been a tradition in Hinman [College] that people look forward to,” Murman said. “It’s always the same weekend every year, so they know when to look forward to it, which is helpful.”

Murman said the “Sleep Out” was not meant to simulate homelessness because the true experience of homelessness lasts more than one night. However, the event does raise awareness about the conditions homeless individuals live in year-round.

“We have the privilege of going back to our dorm or apartment,” Murman said. “So on nights like this where it’s easy to be like, ‘Oh, it’s cold, let’s go inside,’ other people don’t have that.”