



SOCIAL SERVICES NEWS

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SAFE CONNECT TO LINK PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS WITH SERVICES

HICKORY -- While there are many groups working on the issue of homelessness in Catawba County, it has often been difficult to locate the help needed in specific cases.

A new website hopes to correct that problem, providing a virtual portal for citizens, law enforcement, or nonprofits to quickly refer persons experiencing homelessness to resources and information. It can be accessed at <http://safeconnectcatawba.com>. A multi-disciplinary team worked on the SAFE Connect project throughout 2015. The word "SAFE" in the name refers to the services that are often needed: shelter, assistance, food, and emergency care.

Now anyone with a computer or smart phone can access the site and immediately learn about available services and where they are located. The service can also use GPS to identify the closest service.

A person using the site selects the types of services they need and a series of links pop up listing the choices available in that area and how to contact them. Users of the service may also click on a button for immediate assistance, and a message is sent to a local person who can provide personalized information and assistance.

"We hope that governmental and non-profit groups in our area will use this site to refer persons experiencing homelessness to the most appropriate services," said John Eller, director of Catawba County Social Services. "Concerned citizens and persons who are experiencing homeless can also use the service if they have access to a computer or smart phone. The service is also a valuable resource when a person is at-risk for becoming homeless. This will be a great complement to United Way's 211 system and we will even have the 211 link visible so those interested can see their robust database should they want to obtain information other than homeless services."

The long term intent is for this service to eliminate the problem of persons contacting multiple agencies trying to find different kinds of assistance.

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