

WHALLEY/Surrey council wants NightShift to conduct independent impact study before shelter request is considered

Mission still needs business support

A religious group's plan to set up a mission for Whalley street people remains in limbo. The NightShift Street Ministries Society wants a

Ted COLLEY Staff Reporter

building permit to allow renovations to the Philippine Community Centre at 13686 Hilton Rd., where it intends to provide

The organization claims it is feeding somewhere between 200 and 500 people per week. The group had a second

meeting with Surrey council

support of its neighbours and must pay for an independent impact study before its request will be considered. NightShift is currently

wants to move indoors where it can expand its services. Council's response has been cautious, largely because NightShift has

local businesses. The BIA's executive committee has alienated the group for their support. Since then, the group has been operating out of nearby building which street people could use as a place to eat and a place to sleep overnight on weekends. Local businesses are complaining of problems associated with the operation and have asked the BIA's executive committee to the BIA's a

NightShift.

Connor met with the BIA's executive committee a few months ago, to ask for their support. Since then, the group has been operating out of nearby building which street people could use as a place to eat and a place to sleep overnight on weekends. Local businesses are complaining of problems associated with the operation and have asked the BIA's executive committee to the BIA's a

In an interview with *Nozz* last week, BIA president Pete Nichols said he was disappointed that the residents and businesses decided they didn't support NightShift in their neighbourhood. Connor didn't please h



Ministry worker MaryAnne Connor hugs Wendy, who took in the offerings from The NightShift Street Ministry Society. The fledgling ministry served up hot food and prayer at an empty lot on Bentley Road in Surrey. RIC ERNST — THE PROVINCE

'Without these people ... I might have gone mental'

VOLUNTEERS: Church group forges ahead, feeding Surrey's homeless

BY KENT SPENCER Staff Reporter

Paul McGroarty is living on the edge in downtown Surrey. It's a few nights off the tracks.

The 44-year-old has been given a bowl of chili from a soup kitchen, but the bowl is forgotten, cradled in his hands at a precarious angle, threatening to spill.

McGroarty is on a rant about his life and his anger — although he feels good about the people who feed him without judging him.

"I've fallen on hard times," he says loudly, jabbing a finger. "Without these people at the soup kitchen, I might have gone mental."

His rambling monologue doesn't make a lot of sense, but then neither does his present life. Once a successful Toronto hairdresser, he's now living in a tent in a park with his dog. Recently, someone "pissed him off" and he came to the soup kitchen rather than "beat him up."

McGroarty's despair seems the worst among the three dozen homeless people who have gathered in an alley along Bentley Road.

They've arrived to scoop up sustenance from a Surrey church-based

group called NightShift Street Ministries.

The dinner truck parks under the warm glow of a street lamp. It carries a sign reading: Jesus is Lord in Whalley. Volunteers are heavy on being saved through Jesus Christ. The night is cool and clear.

As everyone comes together munching food, the chatter sounds more like a lively house party than a gathering of the homeless. Acquaintances are renewed, prayers are said and for a few minutes, everyone is inspired by each other.

"These people are hurting. They need people to give comfort to them," says volunteer Carol Webber. "It will go on forever until they get help."

Tonight, the warm mouthfuls of chili will be enough to see the needy hanging through another bleak winter's night.

The NightShift Ministry does not have the official blessing of Surrey council. Business and residents complain there are too many social services already in the area. But Surrey bylaw officers have left the kitchen alone.

Surrey is considering a permanent location at the nearby Philippine Community Centre on Hilton Road. For now, the volunteers have plunged

health licence. They say too much is at stake. With even colder weather in the forecast and possibly snow, NightShift's

Irv Hildebrand says lives could be lost. In response, the needy appear out of the night as if by magic, mostly dressed in triple layers of clothing, but occasionally showing up in bare legs and sandals. They live in tents, cars, dumpsters and bushes.

As one of the workers observed, some will never have a regular job or own a home. Many, he said, have suffered physical or sexual abuse and others in trouble with the law. Some are just down on their luck, grateful for a helping hand. Brad Dunn, 37, was laid off from a sawmill in Mission. With his girlfriend almost due with their child, he "realizes he's not the only one" with problems. At least Dunn has been promised a job.

The night comes to an end all too quickly. A final prayer is said as everyone packs up. It feels like the breakup of summer camp. Volunteers suppress their guilt; the others fade back into the alley.

For those who want to help the effort, organizer MaryAnne Connor can be contacted at connor



JUDY HIEGINBOTHAM

"They said, very adamantly, we'll do it your way. That says a lot about the lack of co-operation and working with others," Nichols said.

On Monday, Connor said she regretted her comment to Nichols.

"I answered and said regardless, I would go the next day and open doors. I meant no disrespect. I would like to likely apologize for that," Connor said.

Nichols could not be reached for comment before press deadline.

Connor told council volunteer organization been too busy helping needy meet with neighbors.

"We have not had a lot of time to spend having public information meetings, but that is on our agenda," she said.

Connor and her associates told council they're anxious to move quickly establishing their mission. "There is a process,"

Coun. Judy Hieginbotham said. "I understand you desire to get going immediately, but we have to make sure everything is in order