

# Coalition to help those in need

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SOUTHWEST HARBOR — The MDI Community Campfire Coalition is coming together to assist those in need this winter.

The goal, said Harbor House executive director Elena Scotti, is to serve those who fall between the cracks: they earn too much to qualify for existing assistance programs, but not enough to cover soaring food and fuel costs.

Harbor House convened the coalition, but it quickly became a collaborative effort.

"We've gotten a lot of great feedback and a lot of commitment from different organizations, in large ways and small ways," Scotti said.

The goal is to raise funds for a single "pot" of money, making it easier for people to donate to and for those in need to find and apply to. Right now, folks must find their way from one assistance program to another, including general assistance from the town, food pantries, fuel assistance programs, and church aid. Those not accustomed to needing assistance might not know where to go at all.

Maine Sea Coast Mission has agreed to be the fiscal agent for the initiative; they will take in funds and qualify candidates.

As part of an awareness campaign, an informational flyer is being finalized, to be distributed through supermarkets, banks, and other businesses, and organizations across MDI.

The flyer will include general information about qualification criteria, as well as an application. The MDI Nonprofit Alliance has agreed to print up 5,000 of a goal of 10,000 flyers. The list of community services, businesses, churches, and clubs that have committed to the coalition is evolving, Scotti said.

Next week, staff at Harbor House and Neighborhood House will meet with 2-1-1 Maine — a health and human service information and resource center developed by United Ways of Maine — and the Washington Hancock Community Agency to learn about federal services and programs already available. This will be information that will be made available to Campfire Coalition applicants. Healthy Acadia is also putting together an informational sheet for the coalition.

Qualification criteria for the local Campfire Coalition will be based on a sliding income scale, designed to catch those who don't qualify for federal or state programs but are still in need, said Scotti. Those who do fall below poverty levels will also be helped, she said.

The application will be simple to use, she said, and people will be encouraged to apply for assistance in advance of a crisis.

Neighborhood House has agreed to be the coalition's information center. But for now, those who would like more information may call Harbor House at 244-3713.