

Heating help effort expands

SOUTHWEST HARBOR — A consortium of community service organizations, town officials and churches have formed an umbrella organization called the MDI Community Campfire Coalition to help low-income people heat their homes this winter.

Representatives from about 20 interested stakeholders attended the initial meeting of the coalition held earlier this month at Harbor House Community Service Agency in Southwest Harbor.

“I was elated that so many people came to the first meeting and were willing to help,” said Elena Scotti, Harbor House’s executive director.

One of the big questions facing those who attended was what geographical area to serve. It proved to be an easy decision, Ms. Scotti said.

“I was elated that so many people came to the first meeting and were willing to help.”

— Elena Scotti

“The group together agreed it [the program] should be island-wide,” she said.

A basic organizational structure also was agreed upon at the meeting. Three agencies will provide the core services.

Harbor House will serve as the central hub, managing the efforts of all involved, and developing an awareness campaign, getting out information about the service through mailings, flyers and media outlets.

The Neighborhood House in Northeast Harbor is to maintain an information hotline for clients, educating them about available services and helping them negotiate the necessary paperwork to determine eligibility.

The Maine Seacoast Mission in Bar Harbor is to consolidate funds raised for the program by various organizations and take information from clients to determine their eligibility to receive services.

Raising money for the heating

program will be the most important component, Ms. Scotti said. A fund-raising committee is to meet this week to discuss ways to raise money. Plans now range from grassroots efforts like selling chili at the finish line of this weekend’s MDI Marathon, to seeking grants from United Way and other organizations.

The heating assistance program will not just meet the needs of people living below the poverty line. Ms. Scotti has said the program also would serve people who fail to qualify for existing programs, those who are falling through the cracks, working people who find it difficult to make ends meet.

Ms. Scotti said she expects the program to be up and running by Thanksgiving.

mgood@mdislander.com