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## **Funding gap threatens homeless**

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### *Shelters request \$250,000 from state*

ST. ALBANS — A state cost-saving measure may leave some Vermonters out in the cold this winter.

Last year the legislature cut state funds from the fiscal year 2010 budget that had been intended to help the homeless find shelter, replacing the funds with federal stimulus dollars. However, the federal funds, through the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP), are not as widely accessible as the state funds, according to Linda Ryan of Samaritan House, the homeless shelter here in St. Albans.

“No one froze to death last winter because the Agency for Human Services said, ‘We’re going to relax the rules. We’re not going to let anyone freeze to death,’” Ryan said.

Funds available through the HPRP program are limited to those who can maintain housing on their own once they’ve been assisted. For example, someone who has lost a job may be able to get help with overdue rent, if they’re able to prove that they will be able to make payments on their own in the future.

The program can also help with first month’s rent and security if the recipient is able to cover the rent themselves thereafter.

However, no funds are available through the program to support overflow shelters or put people up in motels when shelters are full.

The funds, clearly intended to prevent homelessness, “turned out to be more of an offset of the General Assistance system,” Ryan said.

Unlike the General Assistance funds cut by the legislature, which were administered by the state, HPRP is administered by Community Action.

Ryan praised the work of Franklin-Grand Isle Community Action saying it had been successful in using the funds to help area families. Community action groups in other areas of the state have been less successful in making use of the funds, according to Ryan.

The biggest hole is for single, able-bodied adults, Ryan explained. If the shelter is full, and nearly all shelters in the state are, the state has funds to put up families with children or disabled single adults for 28 days. There are no funds available to help able-bodied adults without children.

“I’m very concerned,” Ryan said. “All shelter providers are very concerned.”

Ryan, Elizabeth Ready of the John Graham Shelter in Vergennes, and Rita Markley of Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS) in Burlington, sent a letter to the legislature earlier this month asking for \$250,000 to operate overflow shelters and an additional \$750,000 in General Assistance funds. Last year the legislature allocated \$250,000 in emergency funding for overflow shelters.

The overflow shelter opened last winter in Burlington and never closed, according to Ryan, remaining open throughout 2009.

Locally, Ryan said the number of homeless women continues to increase, but the age has shifted. Previously, the increase was among young women in their twenties, often employed in jobs that didn’t pay enough to allow them to afford an apartment.

Ryan said she is now seeing an increase in women ages 30 to 50. At least some of the increase can be attributed to job loss, Ryan said.