

Belvidere apartment fire victims meet with agencies and churches

Updated: March 21, 2017

UPDATE: BELVIDERE (WIFR) -- The temporary help many people got after the deadly fire in Belvidere a week and a half ago is starting to run out, but those victims aren't on their own. The painful memories are still there for those who escaped the flames. Many say they still have nightmares, flashbacks, and feelings of guilt. One person died and twenty-four people were hurt when the fire broke out in the 800 block of West Jackson Street earlier this month. What started it remains unknown.

"The smoke was so thick and black, I was scared to death. I tried to fight through it and then when got out and couldn't get back in. I was so scared that I couldn't save her and that's what hurts me today. I'm still scared that deep down inside I may have could have done something, and it does hurt," Chuck Taylor said.

Taylor lost his girlfriend Melissa Darling in the blaze. He couldn't save her, but did manage to help two others to safety. One man says he dropped his two daughters out their second story window to neighbors below. They're terrifying moments fire victims are learning to move past with the help of the Comfort Dogs, pastors and church volunteers, and aid groups.

"To have somebody sit there and actually talk to you, it kind of takes the burden off a little more," Taylor said.

Fire victims were able to get all that help under one roof with the Community Action Agency, Red Cross, and Department of Human Services. The first order of business is housing.

"You get someone in their own home, you get them comfortable with that, from that point on they can start rebuilding their lives and we have the agencies here to help them do just that," Owen Carter, with the Community Action Agency, said.

The timing couldn't be better. The money Taylor was given for temporary housing ran out on Tuesday. Many others need household items and medicine.

"There are certain medications you can't live without and when you've had a fire and those things are destroyed it's very important to get those items refilled," Lori Compton, with the American Red Cross, said.

They're all small steps as Taylor and other survivors begin rebuilding their lives.

"It's not like you put everything in the past, but you kind of try to look forward to the future. Use things around you, family, friends, keep happy," he said.

Many of these groups say they'll continue helping until those survivors have everything they need and are well on their way to rebuilding their lives.

The Comfort Dogs also visited kids involved in the fire at their schools.

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UPDATE: BELVIDERE, Ill. (WIFR) -- "Some of these kids watched their friends experience this fire and they were just there yesterday playing with them," Owen Carter, a coordinator with the Community Action Agency, said.

The trauma of the flames for some is too much for forget or move past. Groups like the Comfort Dogs plan on meeting with kids at area schools to help them work through their feelings.

The plan for help is mapped out on a board at the Community Action Agency. It is now overseeing all those groups trying to help.

"This is long-term. There is no quick fix," Carter said.

Right now the main focus is finding housing for the 14 families who lost everything, but finding available units in the same area isn't easy.

"We want to make sure those units are meeting housing quality standards. We don't want to move somebody in to just move somebody in," he explained.

It's not just groups stepping into help. Within hours of the fire donations poured in.

Thousands of pieces of clothing items have been donated, at this point they're busting at the seams, but if you still want to help, you can donate gift cards.

Food, household items like pots, pans, and bathroom towels are also needed, and the victims are very appreciative.

"They can't believe all the stuff that's here. It's kind of like going to Kmart almost, there's a lot of different styles and some of the clothes are almost like brand new," Deputy Chief Bob Koehn from the Boone Co. Fire Protection District 2 station, said.

Some of the victims are staying in hotels, others with family until they can find permanent housing. The Community Action Agency says one of the 14 families have already found a new home.

BELVIDERE, Ill. (WIFR) – Help continues to pour in for families affected by last week's fire that killed one woman and injured dozens more.

Belvidere Mayor Mike Chamberlain is helping coordinate efforts to help the families that lived in the apartment complex in the 800 block of Jackson Street. The Mayor says the city's fire station as well as Alpine Bank and city organizations are helping collect money and household items to give to the families who lost their home.

Below is more information about how to help:

- The Boone County Community Foundation is accepting monetary donations in cash or checks in the name of the Jackson St. Fire, at Alpine Bank located at 600 S. State Street in Belvidere.

- Any organizations or groups who have been collecting money is asked to direct them to Alpine Bank. All of the funds collected will be going to the needs of those impacted by the fire.

- The District 2 Fire Station at 1777 Henry Luckow Lane in Belvidere is collecting gift cards and household items (no clothing).

- The Community Action Agency will also serve as the clearinghouse for any needs of the residents. Residents are asked to call 779-348-7569.

- Anyone with furniture or other items to donate is asked to call the Community Action Agency at 779-348-7570 and leave your contact information. Once the exact needs of the residents has been determined, the agency will contact you.