

211 SNAPSHOT: HEATHER

In mid-December, as severe cold weather descended earlier than expected across Connecticut, Heather of New Haven wondered what she would do to survive the night.

Heather spent most of her adult life as a nurse – until she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Then, the day after Christmas in 2001, her house in Hamden burned down. And she lost much more than her home: her husband and seven-year-old son were killed in the fire.



After cobbling together temporary housing for several years, Heather found herself without a home this fall.

“The winter came early this year,” she says. “I tried to save as many pieces of clothing as I could from the trash to try to stay warm.”

And there was a second layer of danger to Heather’s situation: her MS. “It wreaks havoc on my body, especially in the cold.”

Faced with months of freezing temperatures and limited options, Heather dialed 2-1-1. “Everyone said that’s the place to start.”

Her timing was perfect: the Governor had enacted Severe Cold Weather Protocol, instantly activating state agencies and municipalities to coordinate with 211 and the state’s network of shelters to make sure that anyone in need could receive shelter from the outdoors, including transportation to shelters.

A trained, compassionate 211 Contact Specialist answered Heather’s call and, within minutes, provided her and her husband with an up-to-the-minute list of available warming centers.

They headed to [Varick Memorial A.M.E. Zion Church](#), the first option on their list.

“There was a line around the block, but we got in for one night,” she shares. “They gave us blankets, sheets and food – more food than we had had in months.

There were so many people the second night that Varick sent us to the Quality Inn in Stratford and provided transportation there.”

The experience was an unexpected luxury: “I felt like a queen. The staff was organized, professional and didn’t judge us. I was warm, I was able to sleep in a bed” – her voice breaks – “and I was able to take a shower. I stood in there for about an hour. It was such a treat to have a shower with soap, towels and a blow dryer. We also had food to eat – they fed us breakfast with coffee.”

Heather has also been working with 211 to find long-term housing solutions. “211 has been helpful. They arranged for me to complete a Coordinated Access Network (CAN) assessment, and I’m waiting to hear back but looking around myself too.”

211 helps Connecticut ensure that the most vulnerable among us can access protection from severe cold, which can be life-threatening if people are exposed to the elements for extended periods of time. Heather is grateful that 211 was there for her in a time of dire need. “If it weren’t for 211 I could have ended up in the hospital or dead.”

“Everything stems from 211,” Heather says. “They guide you and tell you how to navigate all the options: they tell you where to get food, clothing, shelter, boots, coats... I tell everyone to call 211.”