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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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United Way of Missoula County seeks donations of tents for Temporary Safe Outdoor Space

Thursday storm destroys majority of tents on Highway 93 South site

Missoula, July 2 – United Way of Missoula County, which handles logistics for the Temporary Safe Outdoor Space (TSOS) for unhoused Missoulians, is seeking donations of new or gently-used two- or four-person tents to replace those destroyed at the TSOS during Thursday’s unexpectedly strong wind and rainstorm.

The storm destroyed the majority of tents inhabited by the 15 residents currently living in the TSOS, according to United Way chief executive officer Susan Hay Patrick.

“The 20 tents erected on the site in December, while high-quality, were designed to be erected for recreational purposes, perhaps several times a year, not to be lived in during all weather conditions for seven months,” Patrick said. “Before Thursday’s storm, we had already been scouring local, regional, and national tent providers for about 30 tents (which would give us 10 extra),” Patrick said. “This has been a challenge, due largely to low inventory nationwide.”

She said that a number of 9x11-ft. tents were purchased locally on Friday, to replace those destroyed Thursday evening, but they are too large to fit the 8x12-ft. platforms at the TSOS. “We’ll erect the new tents on the ground if we have to, but that’s not ideal,” Patrick said, “so we’re asking generous Missoulians for donations of new or gently-used tents that would fit on an 8x12-ft. platform.” She asked people wishing to donate to email TSOS@missoulaunitedway.org to arrange any donations, and requested that donations not be dropped off at the TSOS.

Patrick thanked donors – including Blackfoot Communications, Anderson ZurMuehlen & Co., the University of Montana Campus Recreation department, and the university’s Experiential and Student Success office – that responded to United Way’s call earlier this week for tents, shade tents and electrolyte-fortified beverages to help keep TSOS residents safe during the heat wave. “Our recent weather has been tough on everyone,” Patrick said. “It’s been especially hard on our most vulnerable neighbors, including people living at the TSOS. We know Missoulians respond when asked for help, and we know many Missoulians have a lot of camping gear. We’re hoping people with extra tents they’re not using will donate them to house people at the TSOS.”

Opened in December 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the TSOS is a legal secure, staffed environment on private land of Hwy 93 South that prioritizes serving people experiencing homelessness who are not accessing existing services or resources. A goal of the TSOS is to link residents to appropriate, sustainable housing. United Way of Missoula County handles logistics for the project, which is overseen by Hope Rescue Mission.

Patrick noted that the city-county incident command team working to identify land for legally sanctioned safe outdoor camping is expected to issue its report soon. “Meanwhile, our responsibility is to care for the people now living at the TSOS,” she said.

United Way of Missoula County brings people together to identify problems and craft creative, lasting solutions that change lives and build a stronger community for everyone. Visit MissoulaUnitedWay.org for more information.

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