



FROM THE SHUK

Anticipating another rough Vermont winter, Shuk Manager Karen Robair and members of her staff spent last summer hopping from garage sale to garage sale in search of sleeping bags that would help homeless folks stay warm when the air turns frigid. Though quite a few were gathered, by mid-November only one remained. The need is still great – If you have a sleeping bag you’re no longer using, please stop by the Shuk to drop it off. There’s no doubt now that winter has arrived!

Vouchers for warm coats, hats and socks are also available at the Shuk for the homeless and for new Americans. Occasionally, Karen says, she has to use all her language skills to convince new American shoppers to swap their flip-flops for real shoes and socks, even if they’re slogging through the snow. “At this time of year I won’t let anyone leave if their toes are showing!” she exclaims.

The Shuk serves as a thrift shop for the greater community as well. On the Wednesday afternoon that this interview took place, there was a constant flow of customers, usually leaving with a large bag or two in their arms. The racks are full and there is merchandise in boxes here and there. In addition to clothing, there are rugs, dishes, pictures, holiday novelties, toys, videos, even eyeglasses in stock. “We’re bursting at the seams at the present time, although there’s a healthy turnover in goods,” Karen says. “We’re hoping to be able to expand our space as part of Imagine 2025.”

The Shuk collaborates with many organizations throughout the area that look out for needy people and help them find the goods that will ease their living situations, including COTS, the Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf, Spectrum Youth Center, Outright Vermont, the Pride Center, Howard Mental Health, the Boys & Girls Club, King Street Center, city schools, BTV CopWatch, and ANEW Place (a homeless service agency). Since many of the generous donors to the Shuk contribute merchandise because of OZ’s support of needy people in the community, the Shuk donates a portion of its yearly profits to a local agency whose mission aligns with the synagogue’s. This year the Sara Holbrook Center received nearly \$1,300, which enabled a new American child to attend summer camp.

“The Shuk is my passion,” Karen says. “We serve all walks of life and hear all kinds of stories. Some break your heart, some make your heart soar.” She is looking forward to meeting and helping the Afghani families who will be arriving in Burlington soon.

When grateful recipients ask how they can repay the kindness they encounter when entering the Shuk, Karen tells them, “When you get to where you’re going, turn around and help the person behind you. Pay it forward.”