

Central Oregon homeless rate increases 8%

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Of over 2,000 homeless, 79% are employed, 56% say high rent is primary cause

Today the Homeless Leadership Council announced the results of its annual point-in-time homeless count, which was conducted on January 25, 2007. The surveys showed that in Central Oregon there was an eight percent increase in self-identified homeless households who reported being unable to afford rent. In addition, 79 percent of homeless households reported that they were employed. Results of the surveys can be found at the Homeless Leadership Council website. The "point in time" homeless count provides a snapshot of Central Oregon's homeless population. This year there were 2010 self-identifying homeless individuals and the majority were families with children. While it is not a comprehensive count, it provides valuable information to those serving the homeless, helps to educate the public about the growing issue of homelessness in our region and helps direct public policy planning and development. Homeless households overwhelmingly identified affordable rent as the leading cause of homelessness. Of the households surveyed, 56 percent reported they were homeless because they couldn't afford rent and 79 percent reported they had employment. This represented an 8 percent increase from households surveyed in 2006. "The increase in homelessness for both families and children in Deschutes County emphasizes the real need for emergency shelter, transitional housing, affordable housing and permanent supportive housing," said Liz Hitt, Co-Chair of the Homeless Leadership Council. "On the day of our count, there was only shelter for 15 percent of the homeless people of our community. We must do more to provide support for these families." The Homeless Leadership Council highlighted that the majority of homeless in our area are families "they accounted for 78 percent of the homeless in the tri-county region. In Deschutes County, 80 percent of the homeless were families. Overall there were 712 children counted, which made 37 percent of the homeless population in the tri-counties. During the count, volunteers met a man that came to Central Oregon in late December after hitchhiking across country. He'd grown-up in Oregon and returned after encountering numerous struggles. A veteran who lost his wife and children in a tragic accident, the man was injured on the job and as a result could not keep up with his debts. In an attempt to find employment he traveled to the Midwest, where he was assaulted. He decided it was time to return to Oregon and ended up at a local shelter. In February, after a two month stay, he moved to Southern, Oregon, after finding a job that also provided him with housing. Volunteers also counted a 61-year-old disabled woman. She lost her mobile home in Bend and found herself homeless after she could no longer stay with family. In late January, she received a housing voucher, and is on the move to her new apartment. "These individual's stories help show us what transitional shelter and services can do," said Corky Senecal, Housing and Emergency Services Director at NeighborImpact. "Only through supportive programming and affordable housing solutions are we going to solve the problem of homelessness in the tri-county area."

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