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# This Army helps fight off despair

By Cynthia Whitfield  
Of the Emerald

Salvation Army members do more than stand on street corners during the Christmas season, ringing bells to collect donations. The organization works with the poor and the temporarily needy all year, providing a wide variety of programs and services.

Lane County Family Services director Brad Smith says most people still think of the Salvation Army as an organization devoted to helping alcoholics. "We do see a lot of alcoholics, but we help lots of other people too."

Family Services, the largest Salvation Army branch, provides emergency food, furniture, clothing, medication and fuel to people needing short-term crisis help.

The League Of Mercy visits nursing homes and provides Christmas gifts for prison inmates. Dozens of poor children are sent to a free summer camp near Portland each summer.

The army even dabbles into detective work by providing a missing persons service dedicated to locating missing loved ones.

Salvation Army retail stores provide a major source of funding for these programs, especially for the extensive Family Services program. The stores, located in Eugene and Springfield, sell used clothing, furniture, and utensils.

Approximately half of the Family Services clients are local residents. The rest are "just passing through," Smith says.

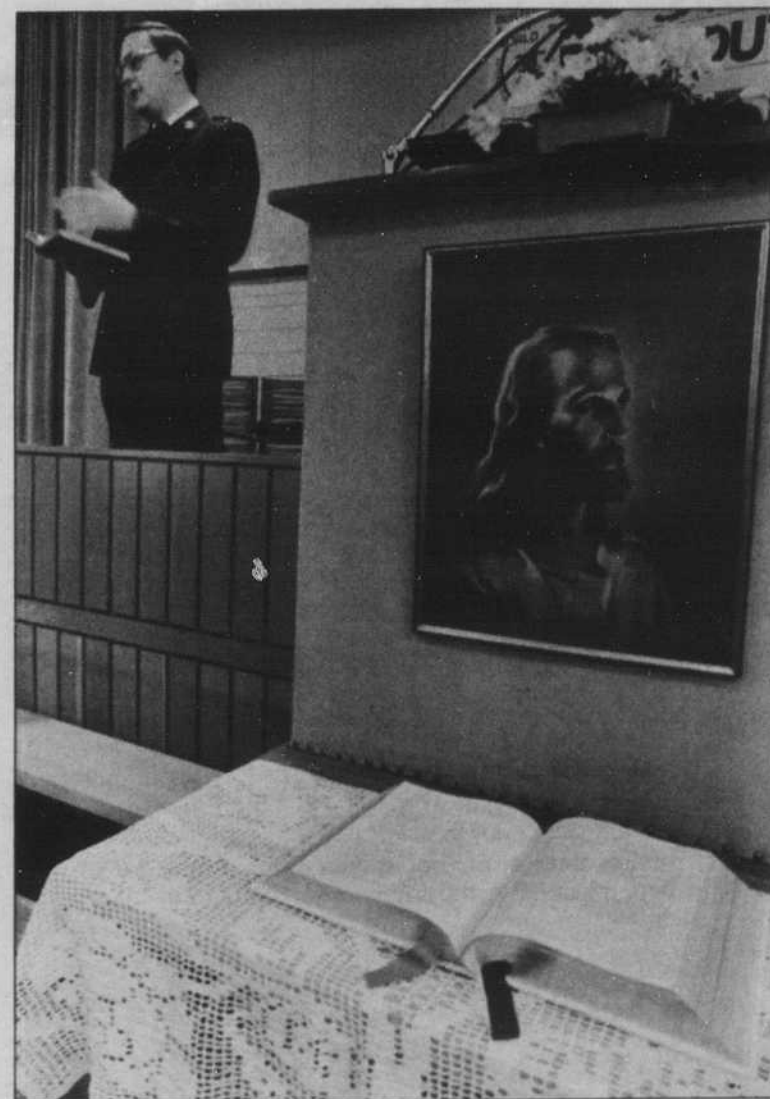
Smith says there are a variety of groups within the homeless population, including the typical "hobo." One fast-growing group of clients is the "new poor" — displaced families living in their cars and moving around the country looking for jobs, Smith said.

Transient single women form another burgeoning subgroup. "Used to be you didn't see any," Smith said.

Other typical clients include women and children in need of food or clothing, migrant farm workers, newly released prison inmates, senior citizens, abused women and children, and the chronically mentally ill, Smith added.

Smith says the organization serves more mentally ill people than it used to. Beginning in the 1960s, there was a trend toward deinstitutionalizing patients and using medication to "manage" them instead. But a visit to the doctor once a month isn't enough for some people who may receive monthly checks but are unable to manage them, Smith says.

Last-stage alcoholics, who tend to avoid seeking medical care, pose another problem. A man recently came to the Family Services office complaining to Smith his leg was "giving out." Apparently, his leg had been set on fire by some



Photos by Steve Gibbons

Salvation Army Capt. Benton Markham says that helping the needy with life's basic needs is necessary before they can receive spiritual assistance.

boys in another town. The man hadn't seen a doctor, and gangrene had begun to infest his leg, Smith says.

The army's Lane County chapter is run by Capt. Benton Markham, pastor of the Salvation Army church and director of the social services ministry. Smith, who earned a degree in psychology from the University, is a lay member of the organization.

William Booth founded the Salvation Army in 1880, after he noticed his own church did little to help the poor. "He wanted to start a more aggressive program," Markham says. "He realized that before you can talk about spiritual conditions, you have to take care of basic needs."

Clients are not required to worship at the Salvation Army chapel or express religious sentiment. "If the people themselves pursue it, we offer spiritual counseling. But we don't sit them down and give them a spiritual headlock," Smith says.

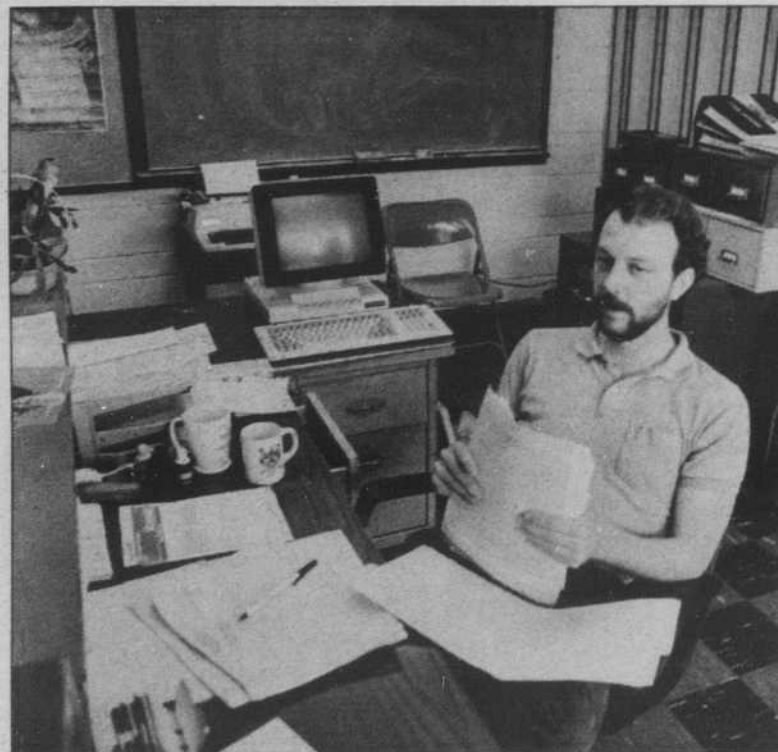
"Lots of things happen around here," Smith adds. "Recently, a man walked in with a stab wound in his back. He'd gotten into some kind of fight. The guys group together to protect each other, but there's also the chance of running across someone who wants your bedroll or something."

A man in overalls approaches Smith's desk. "Bedroll is a tramp's most important possession," the man says.

The man shows Smith a piece of paper. "I got a ticket for trespassing. These cops come up dressed like tramps. I was hanging out in a lot full of empty cars, and they come over," he says.

Smith shakes his head in sympathy before giving the man enough food to last for several days.

But because donations and store sales vary, the organization cannot always fill the demand for goods and services. "It's hard when you can't help someone with a legitimate need," Markham says.



As Family Services director for the Salvation Army's Lane County chapter, Brad Smith is ready to assist people with many special difficulties and needs.

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