

**COMMUNITY**

**Agencies working to aid homeless**

Plans to use funds from Legislature to be discussed

By Hope Nealon  
Emerald Reporter

Help is on the way for the increasing number of homeless, because city groups have proposed new strategies to help the homeless get off of the streets and become self-supporting.

Community and governmental agencies met to discuss new strategies for the homeless in August and earlier this month, said Steve Manela, Lane County Intergovernmental Human Services Administrator.

The Lane County Health and Human Services, the Intergovernmental Human Service Committee Basic Needs/Community Action Subcommittee, and other interested groups will put their strategies to work with \$500,000 in emergency housing funds set aside by the Oregon Legislature in 1991.

The strategies include helping to resettle families and individuals into affordable housing and enhancing support services to include child care services. They will also try to help the homeless evolve from homelessness to permanent housing and economic independence through guidance and support.

Susan Ban, executive director for Eugene Emergency Housing, said the main problem is that there is not enough affordable housing for low-income families. Ban said homelessness in Eugene is increasing and needs to be dealt with now.

The waiting list for beds is three to four weeks long, Ban said. This means people are forced to live on the streets, in their cars or in the campgrounds.

Four years ago the average length of stay in the shelters was 10 days, the average stay last year was 48 days, Ban said.

However, Manela said there are open beds available in other shelters now.

"About half of the people we have served have had an adult or two employed at minimum wage," she said. "The issue is not that they are not employed, but that minimum wage cannot support them."

Ban said Manela's strategies are significant for addressing long-term problems, but the short-term problem of needed housing still remains.

"The Eugene Mission has a 250-bed capacity and generally they have 50 available beds for singles," he said.

"There are some folks who have an independent nature who choose not to be institutionalized, whether that's emergency shelter or housing project," he said. "Their preference is to be more independent."

"Some object to staying at the Mission on the basis of the religious requirement for staying overnight in chapel."

Nevertheless, Ban said more low-income housing is needed now, so that people can stay in their houses and remain self-sufficient. Finding resources that support them in a crisis is important, she said.

The Lane County Housing Authority is part of one of the



Photo by Andre Ranieri  
*Funds from the Oregon Legislature may be used to improve conditions and space for homeless families in local shelters.*

proposed solutions for the shortage of low-income housing. Jim McCoy, executive director of Lane County Housing Authority, said his role has been more technical than political.

McCoy said he will use his agency's resources to develop low-income housing. He said LCHA is currently working with services such as White Bird Clinic to provide important support systems in order to keep the homeless in their homes when crises hit.

"We will provide the housing, but what we want to see is service provided that will help that family stabilize," he said.

One service covering the support aspect of the plan is the White Bird clinic in Eugene. Director Bob Dritz said his group's part in the new plan is to help the homeless by providing support and guidance. He said the clinic concentrates on mental and physical aspects, and substance abuse counseling.

Dritz said the clinic runs different kinds of groups to meet different types of needs. The care varies from providing individual long-term counseling, to support groups that offer ways of meeting other people in the same situation.

"As I look out my window now, I see a group of about 25 or 30 meeting," he said, referring to an open group where

anyone can come and discuss the problems they are facing.

Dritz said the meeting gives individuals a sense of a social setting to vent their feelings, because homelessness can be a very lonely existence. The homeless are many times mistaken as one homogenous group, but are almost a cross section of society, he said.

One group might be the ones who are confident and skilled, but became homeless due to unusual circumstances, he said, adding that get back to self-sufficiency quickly.

For another group homelessness is a longer process. First, they lose their jobs, then their benefits, then their family and support and finally their home.

"When someone has been on a downhill slide for four years, you don't get back on square one right away," Dritz said.

The last group is the people who never had the skills to be self-supporting. The people who were born into poverty.

Dritz said each of these groups have one thing in common.

"All of these people feel that they are failures," he said. "They have no energy, no self-esteem, and very often you have to find a way to get them sparked."

The Emergency Housing Program will present the plan to IHSC and other groups tonight at 6:30 at Harris Hall.

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