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Roads: Students can volunteer

■ Continued from Page 1A
porary housing through Looking Glass' Station 7 shelter.

New Roads has developed several partnerships with other service providers in the community. Members of Centro LatinoAmericana provide Spanish-speaking youth advocates. Womenspace and Sexual Assault Support Services counsels young girls about how to identify violent relationships.

"We work with a lot of people on the streets about how not to be exploited," said New Roads director Pearl Wolfe.

Homeless youth are usually raped within six weeks after they begin living on the streets, according to a University of Seattle study.

"That's how vulnerable to violence they are," Wolfe said.

Even small troubles can become big problems for homeless youths. When they have nothing to do, they can become easy targets for jaywalking, skateboarding and loitering tickets. These tickets may carry fines of more than \$100 and mark ticketed youths as juvenile delinquents.

"They're not necessarily doing anything wrong; they just need a place to go," Brown said. "The majority of them have no parental guidance."

"Some of the kids I've worked with are very young — 10 or 11 years old. It's terrifying; they're lost and confused."

Brown said there's often no real protection for the youths because they are young and vulnerable.

"Sleeping out in the open — it is a jungle out there for them," she said. "They become sick and they don't have the proper medical

treatment. And for a lot of them, their sexual education is off the street."

During a typical shift, street outreach volunteers check in at the New Roads office on Seventh Avenue at 4 p.m. and log in. Working with one or two other trained volunteers, they carry backpacks of referral cards, snacks and condoms. They talk to youths in the Whiteaker neighborhood, at the Downtown Mall, on 13th Avenue or at the bus station in Springfield.

"We go to all these different spots where we know youth congregate," Wolfe said. "When youth start to trust the volunteers, they start to come in."

After each shift, volunteers return to the New Roads office to log-out and discuss their experiences.

"I think the unique part about what we do is we go out to the youth on their turf," Wolfe said.

New Roads volunteers made 2,600 contacts with youths last year.

"A lot of them are just not sure of where we're coming from," said Brown, explaining that confrontations with police and downtown security officers often lead homeless youths to avoid all authority figures. "We are not the enemies — we want to be an advocate."

Rather than admitting they need help, teenagers band together for protection and emotional support.

"There's a circle of homeless kids they consider family," Brown said. "It's like a pack of wolves that's been created on our streets."

Wolfe said he also works to

shape Eugene city policy and attends meetings where citizens and city officials debate youth issues. Community members are discussing alternatives other than punishing homeless youth who live downtown, he said.

Brown said she has enjoyed volunteering and urges other members of the local community to join her efforts.

"I've gained a lot of knowledge about what's going on in Eugene and what's going on in our youth population," she said.

Despite the discouragement of being rejected by kids she meets, Brown said the youths who seek help with New Roads sometimes become successful members of the community.

"It's a transitional process," she said.

One teenage boy spent a day showering, shaving, sorting through donated clothes and preparing for job interviews, Brown said. After finding a job, he went back to school and started looking for permanent housing.

"He kept his job, got an apartment," she said. "He's now functioning; he has a foundation."

University students interested in working with homeless youth can sign up for a volunteer training session June 27 and 28 by calling 686-4301. Students can work as youth advocates, street outreach team members or classroom volunteers at the New Roads School.

Wolfe also invited students to volunteer in a new program this summer. From June 22 to Aug. 14, New Roads is organizing a drop-in recreation center with regular field trips at Westmoreland.

Oregon Daily Emerald

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