



PHOTO BY JOANNE ZUHL

Michelle, who is homeless, at the Downtown Chapel after receiving a new "Vial of Life" packet with her medical history inside.

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asked is, 'do you have any medical conditions,'" says manager Steve Mattsson. But he admits that the homeless folks who come in are notoriously poor historians of medical history. Plus, alcohol can mask over many serious medical issues.

"I meet first responders who wonder, 'did I make the right choice?'" says Noethe, who hopes the Vial of Life program will change that.

"The bottom line is we need to make sure those in need – however that is defined – get the right help in an emergency," says Jean Marks with Providence Health & Service's Public Relations office. "Emergency responders seem to be excited about this program because it makes their job easier. They don't have to guess about their patients' allergies and prescriptions," says Marks. "It serves the poor and vulnerable, but it also helps everyone do a better job."

Bruce Strade, executive director of Northwest Parish Nurse Ministries, says they are just getting a feel for how successful the program is, but thinks adapting the program for other agencies is "not out of our reach."

Downtown Chapel's idea for the Vial of Life program originated from Northwest Parish Nurse Ministries' and Providence Health Systems' Vial of L.I.F.E. (Lifesaving Information for Emergencies) program – a traditional method of storing medical information of isolated elders' in readily identifiable pill bottles in refrigerators.

Early this year, parish nurse Sharon Christenson asked, 'why not do this in the homeless community?' and approached Noethe with the idea of implementing the Vial of Life program at Downtown Chapel. Noethe says he immediately took to the idea, remembering times when homeless guests passed out mysteriously in Downtown Chapel's lobby.

He is especially hopeful that the program will help guests with trauma history, including traumatic brain injuries, who cannot recall medical history.

"They don't always keep everything in mind," says Michelle, who is borderline diabetic combined with other medical issues. "And if (medics) don't know about it, that's a problem."

Noethe agrees. "It is essential that first responders, especially in Old Town, are able to identify the Vial of Life pouches and make use of them," says Noethe.

His plan forward is to replicate the Vial of Life program among other Portland service agencies. Noethe has even created a manual for other organizations to implement and evaluate the program.

"I have no doubt this is going to benefit someone," says Noethe. "With Vial of Life, we're not doing case work where we follow people over time, and we won't always get to see the outcomes.

"But I know this will improve lives."

# Human services budget 'horrendous'

*TANF survives with longer time limit, resources partially intact*

BY AMANDA WALDROUPE  
STAFF WRITER

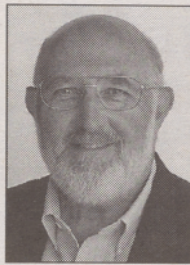
Four months ago, the proposed cuts to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program threatened to cut an estimated 8,000 from needed assistance to stay in housing, secure work and raise children.

But despite a tight human services budget and a \$3.5 billion funding shortfall that the Oregon Legislature had to close, many cuts to the TANF program were avoided. The 60-month time limit, which is how long a family may receive a monthly cash grant of up to \$506, was preserved. Gov. John Kitzhaber had proposed an 18-month life-time limit that would have made Oregon the most stringent in the nation.

Funding was restored to other TANF programs as well, including the Parents as Scholars program and programs providing support services to families.

TANF advocates scored another victory in the last two weeks of the Legislature's session. Oregon received a "bonus" grant from the federal Department of Agriculture for reducing error rates in the state's food stamp program. \$1.4 million of that money is restoring post-TANF payments given to families who leave the TANF program as a result of finding employment. The payments, \$50 a month, are designed to help families as they transition to being fully self-sufficient.

TANF is a program reserved for the poorest of Oregon's poor. It provides a cash benefit for individuals or couples with dependent children to help cover their basic needs while they participate in job training programs, educational programs,



Rep. Mitch Greenlick

**"We have three basic things to do as a state. We have to educate our population. We have to fund public safety, and we have to care for the most vulnerable among us, who cannot care for themselves. ... We are basically failing our most vulnerable citizens."**

REP. MITCH GREENLICK (D-PORTLAND)

and other programs to help them re-enter the work force and become self-sufficient. TANF clients stay in the program for an average of 24 months.

The number of two-parent families in TANF has increased dramatically since the start of the recession; 330 percent since 2007. Overall demand has increased by 57.3 percent.

The extent to which TANF has been preserved is pretty remarkable considering the cuts to other human service programs.

Last week, the Oregon Legislature approved the Department of Human Services' budget, and legislators sounded clear warnings that Oregon's safety net is close to unraveling.

"It was a horrendous budget, with horrendous possibilities," said Rep. Tina Kotek (D-Portland) on the House floor. "It's barely tolerable now...colleagues, please do not feel comfortable in this budget. It is very dangerous."

The total DHS budget is \$7.97 billion dollars. It is 1.2 percent less than the 2009-2011 budget when increased federal food stamp money is not factored in.

Kotek, who was closed to tears toward the end of her speech, said that potential increased future caseloads, combined with staffing shortages and the likelihood that additional funding will not be available is "creating a very fragile system of human

services in this state."

Rep. Mitch Greenlick (D-Portland) was one of the 14 representatives who voted against the budget. "This was a very difficult budget to put together," he said. "But, the fact is, it's inadequate."

The House floor gradually became hushed and silent as Greenlick continued speaking, first about how the governor's proposed DHS budget was "a disaster," and the budget-writing Joint Ways and Means Committee's proposed budget "a catastrophe."

"Eventually," said Greenlick, a member of the Ways and Means Human Services Subcommittee, which wrote the DHS budget, "we were able to put \$100 million back into it to make it only terrible."

"We have three basic things to do as a state," he said. "We have to educate our population. We have to fund public safety, and we have to care for the most vulnerable among us, who cannot care for themselves."

He criticized the way the state determines human services funding, characterizing the process as determining how much is to be spent on education, then public safety, with "what is left over" left for human services.

"We are basically failing our most vulnerable citizens," Greenlick said. "That is not a good place to be."



Rep. Tina Kotek



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