

CAMPING, from page 3

has provided a safe place where people can sleep, but equally important is the personal impact the relationship has in bringing down the isolation.

"I think that's what we really need," Leslie said, again reflecting on the Occupy movement. "Good communities are those where everybody is treated with respect and dignity no matter what your station in life or where you are in the artificial caste system we use. It's really possible that that could be the real transformative moment."

The city and county's winter shelter services opened in November, and within the first week, the number of people arriving for shelter far exceeded last year's figures. As of Dec. 5, the county's warming center — which was projected to serve 40 to 60 individuals — held 90 people. Peak capacity for the center is 102. Likewise, all of the county's family shelters were at capacity. In all, the county reports the family winter service system census is 150 percent more than the highest census for any time in past years.

The unexpected and dramatic increase in people needing shelter and living assistance prompted the Multnomah County Commissioners on Thursday to pump nearly \$800,000 in assistance to housing and homeless services.

Staff in the family shelter system also reported significant differences in families seeking shelter this year. There were more younger families, including teen parents, and larger families with two heads of household and multiple children. The homeless youth system is also reporting unprecedented numbers of youths seeking shelter, with individuals being turned away on a regular basis because of capacity limits.

"I was hearing really heartbreaking stories from everybody — from folks who run our family shelters, from the folks at the emergency shelters, from the folks who

are answering the phones at 211. It was very consistent," Commissioner Kafoury says. "All our community partners were telling me how really incredibly bad it is out there. It just seemed like we had to do something big and we had to do something broad. It wasn't just one particular area — it was every part of our system."

The request comes in advance of the peak shelter demand month of January, when county representatives and service providers expect even higher numbers of people seeking shelter. According to the one-night homeless count, the number of unsheltered homeless families with children in Multnomah County increased by 35 percent in 2011 over 2009.

"We continue to get new people, people who we haven't seen before, people who are new to the system," Kafoury said. "If they are younger, they were able to live with family or relatives for a while. But they haven't been able to get back on their feet."

The bulk of the \$787,000 infusion from the county's General Fund — \$450,000 — is earmarked for eviction prevention. The rest will support higher than expected demands on warming shelters for families, as well as housing placement and rent assistance.

In addressing the City Council Wednesday, JOIN Executive Director Marc Jolin spoke in support of the resolution, saying his organization has seen an unprecedented number of car campers in the past year.

"They live in the constant fear of being told to move on, ticketed or towed," Jolin said. Jolin recounted the story of a man who had left his trailer in a parking lot to go downtown and access services, only to return to find his trailer had been towed. He had no money to pay to get the vehicle back, and consequently, because of lien laws, lost all of his possessions inside. For people like this, Joline said, this policy will be invaluable. "It will help them live more safely while they are still on the streets and work more effectively with us to get off the street," Jolin said. "It complements rather

than takes away from our focus of helping people end their homelessness."

In Eugene, just one of many cities in the country that have allowed overnight car camping, the number of sites for campers has fluctuated between about 30 and 50 sites. One of those sites is the First Christian Church, where Dan Bryant, the senior minister, said people donated trailers to make them available to the homeless.

"I think it's very much of an opportunity for church members to become aware of what are the issues that people face," Bryant said. "And that's a big eye opener to see someone in that situation to become self supporting."

The new camping policy will be reviewed in a year. Among Fish's goals is to have at least a dozen faith and nonprofit partners serving as host sites, with minimal complaints from neighboring businesses and residents, "and ultimately, I'd like to see the families that are served moved through the pipeline and get into permanent housing." Fish said he expects there will be skeptics of the plan, but doesn't accept the suggestion that this program will draw more people without homes to the city. That hasn't been the case in Eugene, and there's no evidence that it has happened in Portland, he said.

"Of all the arguments that are used to delegitimize our work, the one that I find most offensive is the "magnet" or "welcome mat" argument. It is used by some of our critics on the right as basically an excuse to do nothing. There is no evidence that by investing in affordable housing we have put out the welcome mat for low-income people around the country. The overwhelming majority of people we serve in Portland has ties to the region. And frankly, I would proceed with these programs even if it did cause us to have a reputation as a humane and progressive city. This is a national problem and Portland is going to do its part."

Protest rap

By Kathy Carlile

invasion
occupation
eviction
the politician and television
give explanation of the confrontation
by persuasion and confession

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imagination

the situation of the condition

an expression of the petition

to transition from the illusion
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to a fairer distribution

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of democracy by corporation

an interpretation of a vision
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