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Portland, based on federal affordability standards.

Michael Buonocore, the executive director of Home Forward, the federal public housing agency for Multnomah County, said he has heard similar concerns from his staff.

Home Forward recently concluded negotiations with the unions representing Home Forward's employees for a new three-year contract that stipulates wages, benefits and other aspects of employment. During those negotiations, Buonocore repeatedly heard concerns about wages, housing and the increased costs of living in Portland.

"We heard a lot about how difficult the local economy has been," Buonocore said, including stories of staff who are driving farther distances between home and work and concerns about whether they will be able to continue to afford living in their current home. "There is no doubt in my mind that ... it's just really rough for people."

Weinstock said that at the heart of any effective social service is the relationship built between the case manager and the client experiencing homelessness. Often, the case manager learns a great deal about the client's life. The relationship is not a transaction of information – sign this paperwork; here's a list of housing units – but one that can be personal.

There also needs to be trust and consistency, Weinstock said, both of which are built over time.

"That relationship needs to stay in place so (the client) can move from homelessness to housing. If every month or two the person trying to make those difficult changes in their lives is working with (a different case manager), it's very destabilizing."

Approximately 80 seniors call Northwest Pilot Project each week, Weinstock said. Sometimes, it can take the agency's staff a week or more to return the phone call, start with a new client or refer the person to other services.

Weinstock said his organization is trying to hire two or three additional housing placement specialists, as well as increase the number of volunteers and graduate students studying social work to work at the agency.

Weinstock said he hoped the new hires would make it possible to return the phone calls within a few days to a week. Each housing specialist at Northwest Pilot Project works with 50 to 60 clients at a time, which means the new hires would also expand the agency's capacity to assist more low-income seniors.

Another factor affecting staff morale is the sheer amount of time an agency now works with homeless clients.

Ten years ago, Weinstock said, Northwest Pilot Project, like many social service agencies, could find an affordable apartment for a homeless or low-income person to rent within two or three months.

Now, given the shortage of affordable housing, it can take Northwest Pilot Project's housing placement workers a year or more to find an apartment.

"That's stressful, not just for the (client), but for the staff, too," he said. "You're

Portland police to hire homeless liaison

The bureau wants someone knowledgeable about homeless issues to train police to better respond to the needs of unsheltered communities

BY STREET ROOTS STAFF

Portland Police Bureau is looking to hire a homeless community liaison, according to a job announcement posted Monday morning.

As listed, for \$4,440 to \$8,233 a month this new, non-sworn bureau employee would develop a plan for police response to the homeless community and develop training for officers on best practices for communicating, policing and providing services to people living on the streets.

The job announcement comes nearly six months after a report from The Oregonian found people experiencing homelessness accounted for 52 percent of Portland Police Bureau arrests in 2017.

In an interview with Street Roots in late November about police and homeless relations, Portland Police Chief Danielle Outlaw said one of the greatest challenges her officers face is "getting folks the resources that they need in a timely manner." She said this challenge was the result of too few resources and of officers not knowing the ins and outs of what's available and to whom.

Among job qualifications listed for this new position is a working knowledge of Portland's social services available to unsheltered populations, apparently intended to get at this problem.

The city is also asking that applicants know best practices for ending homelessness and understand unsheltered community culture, among other areas of expertise.

The creation of this new position underscores the department's role as Portland's de facto city-sponsored homeless outreach team.

Outlaw also told Street Roots, "It would be awesome to have another entity of some sort available to respond to what these needs are," when there is not a



The tents of homeless campers in Southeast Portland's Buckman neighborhood.

PHOTO BY MB298/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

criminal element to the call for services.

In a press release from the police bureau announcing the position, Outlaw was quoted as saying, "This position is a critical component to our response to those in the homeless community. This person will influence how the Police Bureau responds to people in the homeless community and ensure the Police Bureau is in line with best contemporary policing practices. The homeless liaison will also focus on the imperative partnerships we have with social service and other governmental agencies so we are all on the same page."

Portland's would not be the first police department in the region to have a homeless liaison. Oregon City created such a position in July 2017, however it's filled by a sworn officer who interfaces directly with people experiencing homelessness and is focused on getting to know his town's homeless population personally.

In its most recent Point-in-Time count in late February 2017, Multnomah County, Portland and Gresham tallied 4,177 people experiencing homelessness. That's nearly 10 percent higher than in 2015, according

to the county's figures. Authorities with the county and the city of Portland acknowledge that due to the nature of homelessness, the figure, tallied every two years, is widely considered an undercount.

Homelessness intersects numerous complex issues beyond just housing, including addiction, mental health concerns, domestic and sexual abuse, veterans' needs, disabilities and chronic unemployment.

Of the 4,177 people counted, more than 60 percent reported living with one or more disability, including a mental disability, chronic physical condition, and/or a substance-use disorder, according to the 2017 Point-in-Time report compiled by Portland State University.

The county does not include people who are "doubled up" – those sharing housing with other people for economic reasons. Data collected from local school districts, however, indicates that the figures on this population are on the rise. The district information suggests that there are at least twice as many households with school-age children attending public schools who are living doubled up than just two years prior.

trying to keep that person afloat for a couple years. That puts stress on the system."

As it develops its proposed budget for the next year, the Joint Office of Homeless Services has been instructed, like all agencies at the city of Portland and Multnomah County, to present a budget showing a 1 percent reduction for the city and a 3 percent reduction for the county.

Deborah Kafoury, the chair of the Multnomah County Commission, who is also a member of A Home for Everyone's executive committee, would not necessarily commit to providing budget dollars for increased wages.

"Those are conversations we are going to have to have," she said. "We can't keep adding more and more responsibilities without adding more financial investment."



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