Photos by JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

Volunteer guides, wearing yellow shirts, help individuals check in at the Project Homeless Connect event.

Homeless: Event attendance is still a fraction of local homeless population

Tony DeGoede, Clatsop Community Action staff member, said the event traditionally attracts about 200 homeless people each year. Having half that number this year is actually a positive sign for the community, DeGoede said.

"Our goal is to reduce the numbers," he said.

The attendance at Homeless Connect is still a fraction of the local homeless population.

In 2014, Clatsop County recorded 638 homeless families and 1,038 individuals. Recordings show 321 people were under the age of 18.

CCA is conducting its annual homeless count for this year. The results are expected to be released by April.

Homelessness includes people living with others due to losing their own housing and are "doubled up" which has become more common among the county's youth.

Of all the services offered, DeGoede said, the most popular is, of course, housing services.

However, most of the housing services could only offer waiting lists Wednesday and required proper identification and clean legal history.

"All the barriers to housing, we try to help with," DeGoede said.

CCA's Joanne Seavert collected 60 names of homeless people needing help getting identification or filling out birth certificate order forms. She was able to help 49 people last year.

Obtaining proper identification or acquiring a birth certifi-

cate is often the most important step in overcoming homelessness, Seavert said. People are unable to find work or housing without proper identification.

CCA offers a mail service at its office in Astoria, where homeless people can come in once a week to pick up mail.

Area homeless shelters also connect homeless with post office box addresses, which is key for obtaining an identification from the state Department of Motor Vehicles.

Michael Ruiz, the DMV manager in Astoria, said local agencies often write letters to

the DMV to certify a homeless person's given P.O. box, in order for the person to get an ID card.

"We try to work with different agencies and the public to let them know, even if you are homeless, there are ways to get an ID," Ruiz said. "The DMV really knows not everyone will have an ideal home, so we make alternative guidelines."

Overall, seeing people move from booth to booth was like watching them pass hurdle after hurdle, organizers noted.

Clatsop County's Project Homeless Connect is held each

year in honor of Jessica MacLay, the originator and organizer the first two years, who died in 2011 from injuries suffered in a fatal car accident. The event has since been named in her memory.

The first year, the event was held in a Warrenton church, then moved to the convention center.

Project Homeless Connect, founded in San Francisco, began Dec. 8, 2005, in 26 cities across the country.

The event is a helpful one-day, one-stop event, DeGoede said, but he hopes people do not

forget that many of the agencies offer the same services year-round.

"We do this, and then the next day we are working with housing and advocacy groups," DeGoede said. "We don't stop."

Jerry Martin takes an eye exam to check for signs of glaucoma during the Project Homeless Connect event at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center Thursday.

Pamphlets about mental health sit on a table.