

Finding ways to defeat homelessness

Summit continues to confront, attack the problem of homelessness

By KATHY ANEY
East Oregonian

Common wisdom says the first step to solving a problem is admitting the problem exists.

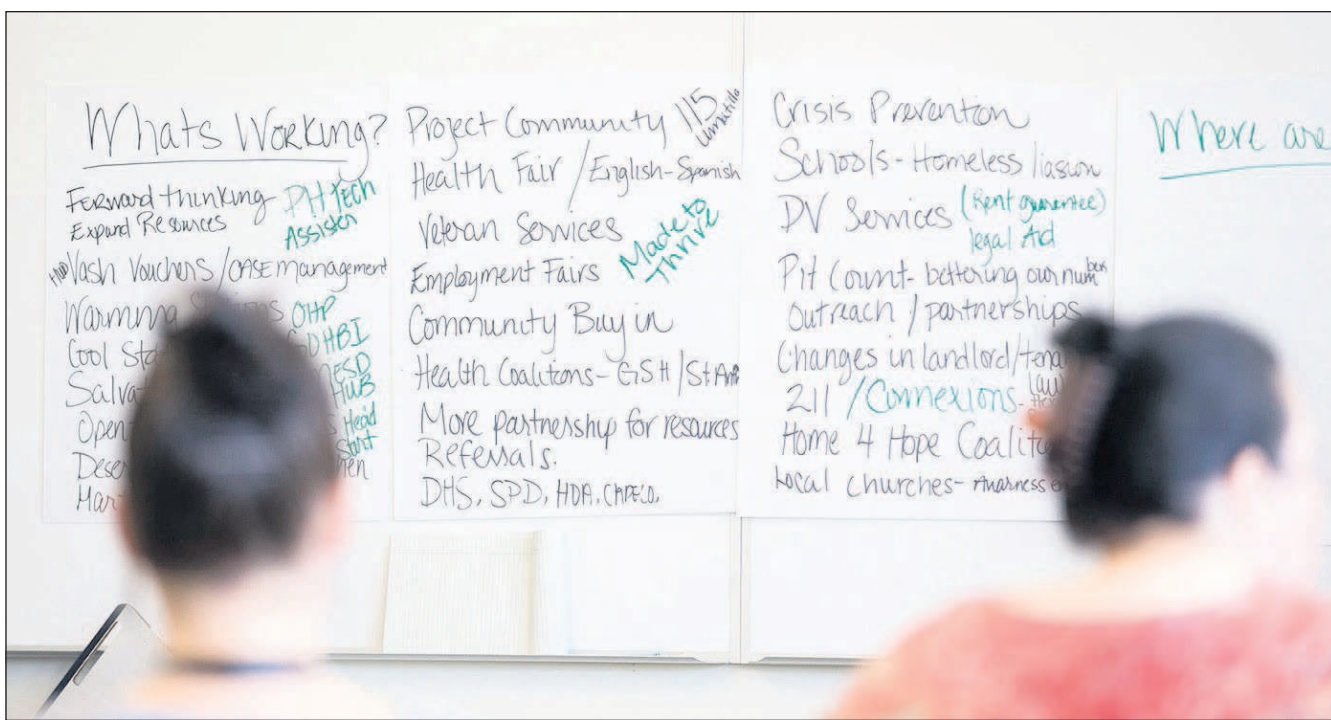
Back in 2011, when 75 people gathered at the first-ever Homeless Summit at Pendleton's St. Anthony Hospital, some expressed frustration that the rising number of homeless was off the community radar and that they were invisible to most.

At this year's summit at Blue Mountain Community College in Hermiston, participants said things have changed.

"Before, we had to start every conversation by proving homelessness was an issue," said Jennifer Richards, case manager with the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon (CAPECO) Moving Forward program. "There's now an understanding that homelessness is here."

"When we first started doing the summit, it was mostly social service providers in the room," said CAPECO Community Services and Housing Director Paula Hall. "Now we have city and county representatives."

The number of homeless is maddeningly difficult to pin down. During the national U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development one-day point-in-time count in January, Umatilla County volunteers counted 115 people who were homeless, compared with 86 in 2015. The exact number is likely much higher and the county's social service agencies may not be getting the federal funding they deserve. Getting a fix on homeless numbers in



Participants in the recent Homeless Summit at BMCC in Hermiston brainstorm about what has been effective in their efforts to eliminate homelessness.



Discussion leader Zach Knight, of the Blue Mountain Action Council, talks to a participant about gaps in efforts to help the homeless.

a rural area proves trickier than in urban America.

"We don't have permanent shelters," she said. "We don't have a mission on the corner with homeless people standing outside."

The HUD definition of homeless includes only those who sleep outside, in emergency shelters or inside places not meant for human habitation such as garages

and sheds. It leaves out those bunking temporarily with family or friends.

"The people doubling up and couch surfing — those folks were not counted in the PIT count," Hall said. "Those people don't meet the federal definition of homeless, but they're still homeless."

The needs are high, say those who work locally with the homeless. Housing and

rental assistance programs struggle to keep up. Waiting lists are long.

At this year's summit, groups of participants gathered around white boards at either end of the large space. They used markers to make two lists titled "What's working?" and "Where are the gaps?"

There was much to celebrate in the past five years,

but they know they face a long slog to the ultimate goal of eliminating homelessness.

The first summit in 2011 led directly to warming shelters in Pendleton and Hermiston and an annual event called Project Community Connect, where homeless people or those on the verge of homelessness receive food, vision exams, dental care, clothing, and other

services. Project Community Connect, which switches between Pendleton and Hermiston, also provides a way for community volunteers to meet people who are homeless.

"Later they might see someone pushing a cart," said Shannon Kruse, of CAPECO. "They know he has a story. He has a name. He has a face. He becomes human."

Other developments arising from the summits include a working group that meets monthly called Home for Hope that allows for constant collaboration between social service agencies.

Each year, the summit creates another 12-month blueprint. This year's group settled on three objectives for the coming year, each to be tackled by a separate work group. The first group will work to launch "urban rest stops" — places where people can launder clothing, take showers and use the internet. A second group will explore a way to help reduce fees for rental applications, replacement identification and other expenditures that cause angst for those who struggle with homelessness. The last group will focus on establishing a volunteer coordinator to connect volunteers with agencies and organizations that need them.

"The community wants to help," said Jenni Galloway, who coordinates Umatilla County's CARE program. "They just don't know how to help."

Irrigon City Manager Aaron Palmquist said people generally care about the homeless.

"Once they meet someone who is homeless and look them in the eye," he said, "empathy overflows."

Contact Kathy Aney at kaney@eastoregonian.com or call 541-966-0810.

BMCC, CTUIR renew joint board

PENDLETON — Officials from Blue Mountain Community College and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation renewed an agreement Wednesday to continue the joint Native American Advisory Board.

The board works to enhance the education of American Indian students and educate BMCC students about the CTUIR.

The Memorandum of Agreement was signed during BMCC's regular board meeting on the Pendleton campus by BMCC President Cam Preus and Board Chair Ed Taber, as well as CTUIR Board of Trustees Chair Gary Burke, CTUIR Education and Training Committee member Kat Brigham and CTUIR Director of Education Modesta Minthorn.

Burke called the document "very important for the future of our tribe and future of our students, and all students."

The Native American Advisory Board was originally established in 2002 and advises the CTUIR education director and the BMCC president. The group provides a forum for mutual collaboration and communication and develops a relationship for resources and program development between CTUIR and BMCC.

The board meets at least twice each year.

Cooking class features fresh produce

PENDLETON — With the farmers' market season here, people can attend classes to learn how to use local fresh produce while creating meals.

Cooking Fresh with Food Heroes is offered June through August on the third Tuesday of each month from 3-5 p.m. at The Salvation Army, 150 S.E. Emigrant

BRIEFLY

Ave., Pendleton. There is no participation fee — in fact, participants will receive a \$5 shopping token at each session to be used at Pendleton Farmers' Market.

"It's a cooking class that supports utilizing locally grown produce," said Mary Ann McCune, WIC manager at Umatilla-Morrow County Head Start. "It's for anybody who wants to learn how to cook fresh."

Each session is a stand-alone class. People may register for one or all three classes. Because of limited space, those interested in participating need to pre-register.

For more information or to reserve a spot, call 541-966-3354.

Youths invited to hit the road

PENDLETON — Youths ages 8-13 are invited to hit the road during the Friday Trip program

through Pendleton Parks & Recreation.

In-line skating at Skate City and a movie at Wildhorse Cineplex are planned for June 24. Participants need to check in at 9:15 a.m. at the Pendleton Recreation Center, 510 S.W. Dorion Ave. The estimated return time is 3 p.m.

The cost is \$19, which includes transportation, skate entry, rentals and a movie ticket. Youths need to bring a lunch or money to buy food for a picnic at Stillman Park. Registration is required by Tuesday, June 21.

Friday Trip programs in July include Chuck E. Cheese and the Carousel of Dreams (July 15), Golf Universe and Get Air Trampoline Park (July 22) and Jubilee Lake (July 29).

For more information or to register, visit www.pendletonparksandrec.com or stop by the parks office, 865 Tutuilla Road.



American Cancer Society RELAY FOR LIFE OF PENDLETON 2016

**June 17-18, 2016
6pm-7am
Sunridge Middle School
700 SW Runnion Ave, Pendleton OR**

**Bring The People, Build the Fun,
Fund The Cure!**
www.relayforlife.org/pendletonor

For Additional Information Contact:
Carol Preston, Event Lead
541-379-6294; relaypendleton@yahoo.com
Heather Farnworth, ACS Staff Partner
509-783-1574; heather.farnworth@cancer.org

relayforlife.org | 1.800.227.2345