



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

Guests wait in line to check in at the homeless shelter, located at 275 NE Second St. in Bend, on Wednesday.

Homeless

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But within that population, the count also showed an increase in the number of unaccompanied homeless youth in the region from 48 last year to 169 this year — a 252% jump.

Thomas said it is hard to pinpoint any one reason why numbers are going up. But in general, a steadily growing homeless population reflects a community without enough housing, untenable rental prices for the working class and not enough resources to support everyone, she said.

Addressing this issue means creating more housing options, ranging from managed homeless camps to multifamily homes, Thomas said. “Without those options, without the continuum of services and resources we’re going to continue to see more visible homelessness in our region,” Thomas said.

Thomas said the large spike in the number of unaccompanied homeless youth — which means kids who are homeless and are not in the care of their parents — could be in part due to the pandemic, as well as a change

in the way homeless people were counted this year.

Because of the pandemic, the county was advised to not send lots of volunteers into camps to do counts and ask people survey questions, and instead get data from service providers, who work with the population more regularly and can provide a more accurate picture of how many people are in this situation than a random count.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which oversees the count, allowed counties more time to gather data, Thomas said.

Homeless service providers and nonprofits were given a week instead of a single day to ask people whether they were homeless the night of Jan. 20.

The fact that schools were virtual could also be a contributing factor, said Eliza Wilson, the program manager of the homeless organization Grandma’s House of Central Oregon, which operates under J Bar J Youth Services.

Because schools were closed, more kids have been reaching out to organizations like hers for services, making

them more visible for something like a Point-in-Time count, Wilson said.

Wilson said she was not surprised to see the high number of homeless youth counted this year.

“I think the (Point in Time) count is only as good as our effort,” she said. “Historically, and nationwide, the (Point in Time) count for youth is substantially lower than other counts.”

Several factors can contribute to a kid becoming homeless. Wilson said one-third of the children she serves experienced homelessness with their family before being on their own. Circumstances like a parent dying, going to jail or substance abuse all can contribute to children becoming homeless and on their own.

In the 12 years Wilson has worked in Central Oregon, she has seen the population grow.

“People always think it’s kids out of the area. It’s not,” Wilson said. “These kids are from Central Oregon.”

A full Point-in-Time count report, which will get into the specifics of the data more thoroughly, will be complete next week, Thomas said.

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Diversion

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“I remember thinking, if he had been a juvenile, his case would have probably been handled completely differently,” Doyle said of the older brother. “He could have applied for diversion, for one thing.”

The case made such an impact on Doyle, it inspired a new pilot program at his next job, with the Deschutes County District Attorney’s office: a diversion court for young adults with minimal records accused of breaking the law in minor ways.

“Young adults ... often make poor decisions, and some of those decisions result in young people entering the criminal justice system,” District Attorney John Hummel wrote to local judges May 26. “Unfortunately, after that has occurred we are likely to see them return to the criminal justice system due to the unintended consequences of an arrest record.”

Because human brains don’t automatically stop developing at age 18, the “emerging adult” program aims to give second chances to people 18 to 24 arrested for low-level offenses of the kind that can follow a person around for a lifetime and lead to more involvement in the justice system.

Two years after the pillow-throwing case, Doyle attended an office retreat at his new job with the Deschutes County District Attorney’s Office. One activity was a “Shark Tank”-themed contest to devise and pitch a specialty court, like one of the county’s existing family-drug and mental health treatment courts. Doyle was paired with fellow Deputy District Attorney Mara Houck, and in about an hour, the two had devised a framework for the emerging adult program.

Doyle and Houck’s pitch won that inter-office competition, but more importantly, it got the attention of their boss, Hummel.

A nine-month pilot version is now scheduled to start July 1. It will enroll 12 young adults who’ve been arrested or otherwise cited with a crime.

According to the district attorney’s office, the three-year recidivism rate for the average 400 cases a year in Deschutes County that involve defendants aged 18-24 is 60%.

Hummel stressed the new program will not be open to young people with long criminal records or those accused of serious crimes, including sex crimes and Measure 11 offenses, which qualify for automatic strict sentencing in Oregon. A number of specialty courts already exist in Deschutes County, including a DUI diversion program, and treatment courts for mental health issues and drug offenders with families.

The emerging adult program will be available only to people who don’t qualify for other specialty courts.

“It’s a policy that actually makes sense, that’s consistent with brain development science.”

—Bobbin Singh, executive director of the Oregon Justice Resource Center

Beyond that, a panel of prosecutors, victim advocates and staff will oversee referrals, including reviewing the alleged facts of a case.

Participants will be assigned a case manager whom they must meet with regularly. They must develop a personal intervention plan and take part in a restorative justice “circle” with trained facilitators. And they must periodically appear before the emerging adult volunteer panel to discuss their progress.

If they complete their intervention plan within six months, their cases will not be charged. Participants who reoffend or fail to progress will be removed and their cases turned over to the traditional criminal justice system.

The idea isn’t completely novel. Other jurisdictions have second-chance specialty courts dedicated to young people. But a novel aspect of the local pilot program is that it will be available before formal charges are filed with the court. The thinking is that once a charge is filed, it can remain on a person’s criminal record for life.

The fact the program will be offered before charges are filed allows for more flexibility, because some charges have associated mandatory sentences.

Bobbin Singh, executive director of the Oregon Justice Resource Center, said he supports what he’s seen of the nascent program. He thinks being offered before charges will lead to better outcomes for participants.

“Once you charge an offense, you then connect it to sentences that are attached to those charges,” Singh said. “So I think it’s important to recognize at the outset that there are developmental factors that exist. It’s the reason we keep youth in a juvenile system that is fundamentally different from how we resolve cases in the adult system.”

Singh believes the diversion court for young offenders is rare but gaining popularity.

“We are seeing more and more state and individual jurisdictions start to look at this population differently,” he said. “It’s a policy that actually makes sense, that’s consistent with brain development science.”

The program isn’t intended to be easy, Doyle said.

“When you’re talking about the mechanics of it, it’s a lot easier to just plead guilty and sign a piece of paper and be done with it,” Doyle said. “With emerging adults, there’s so much more that the person will be required to do.”

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Deputy

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On June 16, 2020, Johnstone took a leave of absence, according to state police records.

On Feb. 11, he retired prior to completion of the investigation.

“It has been an honor and a privilege to serve the citizens of Alaska and Oregon as a law enforcement officer for 25 years,” Johnstone wrote to Sheriff Shane Nelson. “I have come to a place in my life where I recognize the toll the career has taken on me and I am informing you that I am resigning my position as a Patrol Sergeant with the Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office.”

The sheriff’s office would not turn over records from Johnstone’s conduct investigation, nor explain the nature of the complaint against him, citing an exemption in Oregon’s public records law against disclosing information about a personnel investigation of a police officer if the investigation doesn’t result in discipline.

“Thank you for all your service to our community,” Nelson wrote to Johnstone Feb. 11 in response to his resignation. “I wish you all the best in



Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office via Facebook
Grant T. Johnstone posed with Sheriff Shane Nelson when he was promoted to patrol sergeant in September 2017.

your new adventure!”

For his part, Johnstone told The Bulletin his retirement had nothing to do with the conduct investigation. He said the accusation of unprofessionalism was true and he was “absolutely in the wrong.”

“My retirement was due to a medical condition that did not allow me to return to law enforcement by a specific time,” Johnstone wrote. “The internal issue and the retirement were unrelated.”

In November, the office assigned two detectives to temporary roles as patrol sergeants, because several pa-

trol sergeants, including Johnstone, were on leave at the time.

Since Nelson took over as sheriff in 2015, several department employees have sat out for long periods during internal investigations.

Former Lt. Tim Leak, thought to be the right-hand-man of disgraced former sheriff’s Capt. Scott Beard, was investigated for 21 months before he was offered a severance package.

Nelson’s onetime election opponent, former deputy Eric Kozowski, was on leave for 14 months until Nelson fired him for policy violations. A trial in Kozowski’s federal wrongful termination lawsuit is scheduled for late summer.

Former deputy Richard “Deke” Demars was also on paid leave for 14 months before he retired prior to the completion of an internal investigation. While he was in a relationship with a subordinate, DeMars was investigated by Redmond Police Department for allegedly sexually assaulting a different woman. He also resigned before his conduct investigation was complete and the sheriff’s office declined to release records in the case.

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Hybrid

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“It certainly has some wolf-like features, but its behavior and the area it has been repeatedly seen (with extremely high amount human activity) has us wondering if perhaps it is a domestic wolf/dog hybrid,” Walch wrote in an email to The Bulletin. “It can be difficult to tell from photos sometimes.”

Walch said there are occasionally wolves that disperse through Central Oregon, but they generally leave the

area within a couple of days, usually continuing south. There are no known resident wolves or wolf packs in Deschutes County, he added.

ODFW encourages people to fill out a wolf report form, including any photo or video evidence, at www.dfw.state.or.us/wolves/wolf_reporting_form.asp This form provides details of potential wolf sightings to the Fish and Wildlife’s statewide wolf program, as well as local biologists.

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