

Clatsop County homeless connected at annual event

By Kyle Spurr
EO Media Group

More than 100 of Clatsop County's homeless and near homeless population wove through rows of service booths set up in the Seaside Civic and Convention Center Jan. 29 for the sixth annual Project Homeless Connect.

Volunteers for Homeless Connect, sponsored by the nonprofit Clatsop Community Action, guided each person through color-coordinated areas of the convention center.

Red-colored booths were for health services; yellow booths were for family and education; green was for housing, employment, identification, legal and transportation assistance; blue was for food and haircuts. A total of 52 agencies attended the event.

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. Records show 321



Kallie Linder, from Salon Boheme, cuts Mark Jenkin's hair during the Project Homeless Connect event at the Seaside Civic and Convention Center. Services at the Jan. 29 event included free health checks, haircuts, help with housing and obtaining identification, such as birth certificates.

JOSHUA BESSEX PHOTO

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

at the event 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 certificate 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 people 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."



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People are led by yellow-shirt clad volunteers as they visit booths in the housing and employment section of the Project Homeless Connect event in Seaside Jan. 29. More than 100 people came to the event, down from 200 last year.



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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.



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Volunteers hand out donated supplies from Helping Hands Reentry Outreach during the Project Homeless Connect event at the Seaside Convention Center. Supplies included military-grade boots and backpacks, shirts, blankets and toiletries.

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