

Washington County homelessness down slightly per census

The number of homeless persons in Washington County, identified during an annual census conducted the last week of January, decreased slightly from 1,383 persons in 2010, to 1,356 persons in 2011. The decrease reflects the coordinated efforts of community partners to re-tool the homeless response system and increase resources, according to non-profit and county housing officials. The downward trend measured in Washington County comes as homelessness in Oregon increased over the past two years, according to Oregon's January 2011 Point-In-Time Count. Statewide data show that unemployment is the leading cause for homelessness, followed closely by underemployment or inability to pay rent.

Community Action, the lead agency in coordinating the annual homeless count, reports findings that mirror the

statewide data, that unemployment in Washington County is the primary cause for homelessness.

"High unemployment and housing instability are traumatizing to the entire household," said Community Action Housing and Homeless Services Manager Pat Rogers. "Affordable housing is needed to serve the increased number of households now living at or below the federal poverty level."

Community and local government officials point to the implementation of Washington County's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness as contributing to the positive trend. Demographic data on homelessness support the effective program development and strategic approach in the 10-year plan to prevent and end homelessness in our community, officials say.

During the January count, 328 households (39 percent) of the 839 interviewed reported

they became homeless because of unemployment or underemployment, including reduced wages, a shift to part-time work, or a combination of similar factors.

Inability to pay rent, the second leading cause for homelessness, was reported by 316 households (38 percent).

Of the 1,356 persons experiencing homelessness in Washington County:

- 423 (31 percent) were children under the age of 18 years. Of these, 32 children were reported as unaccompanied individuals.
- 27 (12 percent) of school-age children were not attending school.
- 737 (54 percent) of persons were part of a family, such as an adult with child(ren). 69 (8 percent) were veterans.
- 141 (15 percent) were persons homeless as a result of domestic violence.
- 146 (16 percent) were per-

sons with physical disabilities.

• 231 (25 percent) were persons with mental or emotional disorders.

The number of persons experiencing homelessness in Washington County would have been higher were it not for the focused efforts outlined in the 10-year plan to prevent homelessness, officials maintained. Recent activity related to the 10-year plan included:

- Implementation of the multi-year American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) in 2009 with \$824,990 in federal funding awarded to the Washington County Office of Community Development.
- Implementation of system changes aligned with HPRP to prevent homelessness through the Community Action "Warm

Line," a universal point of referral for at-risk tenancies. The combination of systems change and funding contributed to a reduction of Eviction Court cases filed from 4,348 cases in 2008 to 3,819 cases in 2010, officials said.

Implementation of a new intake system hosting Housing and Community Resource Orientation sessions administered by Community Action and the Emergency Shelter Network providers. The sessions assist persons experiencing homelessness by developing rapid re-housing plans and providing access to resources to successfully transition from homelessness to housing.

See the Washington County Point-In-Time Homeless Count report: <http://www.co.washington.or.us/Housing/upload/ONHC-Washington-2011.pdf>.

Tips given for using your grill safely

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) reminds the public to use safe grilling practices as the peak months for grilling fires approach – June and July. Gas grills constitute a higher risk, having been involved in an annual average of 6,200 home fires in 2004-2008, while charcoal or other solid-fueled grills were involved in an annual average of 1,300 home fires.

"Summer barbecues can be a great time, but nobody wants to see the event spoiled by fire," said Lorraine Carli, vice president of communications for NFPA. "There are many simple measures you can take to prevent damage to property, injury, and death related to grilling fires."

In 2009, roughly 17,700 patients went to emergency rooms because of injuries incurred by grill usage. Of about 9,400 thermal burns, children under five made up about one-quarter. These occurred mostly when children touched or bumped the grill.

For gas grill injuries, about a third were burns that stemmed from lighting the grill, while gasoline or lighter fluid was a factor in about a quarter of charcoal or wood burning grill burns.

NFPA offers the following grilling safety tips:

- Use propane and charcoal grills only outside – never use them indoors.
- Make sure the grill is positioned well away from the home and/or deck railings, and that it is not underneath any eaves or overhanging branches. It should also be far from any lawn games, play areas, or foot traffic.
- Establish a child- and pet-free zone around the grill of at least three feet.
- Use grilling tools with long handles that will allow more clearance from the flames.
- Remember to regularly clean fat and grease off the grill and from trays underneath it in order to reduce the risk of it igniting.
- Never leave the grill unattended.

Gas grills:

- Before using the grill for the first time each year, check the gas tank hose for leaks. To do this, apply a light soap and water solution to the hose and turn the tank on. If the hose releases bubbles, this indicates a propane leak. If you find a leak, turn the gas tank off. If the leak

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Between the Bookends

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mission of mercy at an orphanage. But Natalia is also confronting a private, hurtful mystery of her own involving the inexplicable circumstances surrounding her grandfather's recent death. She turns to the stories he told her as a child, including one of a time during the Second World War when his village was cut off from everything, but haunted by the fierce presence of a tiger. Natalia realizes that, through the tales he told her, she will find the answers she is looking for.

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