

Chinook Observer

Event matches people with local lifelines

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Published on February 3, 2016 2:30PM



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Project Homeless Connect, hosted in the Elks Lodge on January 28, filled the room with 25 local businesses and non-profits to offer services to people who face poverty. More than 100 people walked into the room to get a warm meal, dry clothes and medial assistance.



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The DSHS Mobile Community Service Office parked outside of the event and helped 41 people determine whether they were eligible for state cash, food and child care subsidy programs. That number is up from the 31 people it served at Project Homeless Connect last year.

LONG BEACH — More than 100 people living in poverty or without a place to sleep attended the Peninsula's third annual Project Homeless Connect.

On Jan 28, the Peninsula Poverty Response paired with 25 organizations to pull services in one place for homeless people to find information and help on housing, health care, legal issues and other basic needs.

As people walked into Elks Lodge for the event, they added their names to a list and wrote a simple fact for the statewide point-in-time homelessness report: where they planned to sleep.

Homeless snapshot

“It’s really a snapshot of what homelessness looks like around the state on that one day,” Katie Lindstrom said, the county’s deputy director of Public Health & Human Services. “We simply ask, ‘Do you have somewhere to sleep tonight?’”

Volunteers and state officials divide their counties in sections to find people who qualify as homeless. Project Homeless Connect, which is a nationally recognized community effort, is a convenient way to gather information on people who might need help, Lindstrom said.

Out of the 116 guests who attended Project Homeless connect, roughly 50 people said they planned to sleep outside, according to the day’s log. Roughly 10 people planned to stay in a shelter and almost all of the remaining guests said they were staying with friends or in their car.

Lindstrom said nearly another 100 people had already been identified throughout the county as of Jan. 29. She expected the count to be finished by Feb. 3.

Washington’s 2015 Point in Time report stated there were 149 people in Pacific County without a place to live, down from the 207 people recorded the year before.

“Beyond just getting an idea of what homelessness looks like in Washington, this count also gives us an idea of how to meet the needs of the people these numbers represent,” Lindstrom said.

A starting point

Project Homeless Connect Coordinator Bill Buck said many who attended the event are in day-to-day survival mode. Often, long-term needs are set aside.

“I’m not sure how many of the people we serve would fall under the federal government’s standard of homeless, but they all need some type of service,” he said.

As guests walked in the door they were paired with volunteers and given a sheet that had a list of needs they could choose from: a meeting with the Crisis Support Network, legal support from Veteran Affairs, canned goods, blankets or clothes.

A woman who asked to go by Lisa was overwhelmed when she first stepped into Elks Lodge for the day. There were more people struggling like her than she expected to see.

Lisa, 53, left her home three months ago when her marriage dissolved. She needed to start over, and picked Long Beach. The ocean made her feel calm, and the city felt safe.

“I figured if I had to start from scratch I should go somewhere I liked, but it’s been hard,” she said.

Lisa showed off what she had collected during the day. She wore a new winter coat, carried a large sleeping bag and had signed up for health insurance. She had her eyes checked for the first time in years, and was given a new pair of glasses that matched her updated prescription.

As she moved around the room, she recognized some of the volunteers from dinners she had attended around town.

“It’s a small city, but all of the groups trying to help are working together to help,” she said. “It’s good ‘cause I guess there’s a lot of people who need it.”