

## Survey of homeless population shows need

By Denise Ruttan

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Tiffany Fery of Scio knows something of hardship.

Her husband, Don, died about a year and a half ago of congestive heart failure at the age of 44 — while still on the waiting list for Medicaid.

"So many people in my life left me so soon. But during the time they were with me I was so glad," Fery said.

Fery lives in a 1969 mobile home she owns. She lives with her grown daughter and a friend who is waiting for work. The building is dilapidated and has leaks.

Fery has been unemployed for three years. She gets by on her late husband's Social Security and she is a client of Stayton Community Food Bank.

That's how the Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency found her during its one-day survey of the homeless populations in Marion and Polk counties last week.

For the first time for Stayton, the agency organized a warming center for those in need at Stayton Fire Station on Jan. 27. They offered a hot breakfast, clothing, supplies and connections to resources for the homeless as well as those in need.

The count is required so nonprofits can apply for federal funds. The agency had coordinators for rural Marion and Polk counties as well as Salem-Keizer.

Annette Jensen of Stayton is coordinator of ARCHES, a day resource shelter run by Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency. She helped coordinate the count for the canyon region with Cherie Girod of the Canyon Crisis and Resource Center.

"The homeless count is a one-day community snapshot of homelessness in Marion and Polk counties on one individual day," Jensen said.

Food banks, shelters, resource centers and school districts also participate in the count by surveying their visitors and clients that day. Volunteers also fan out to sites the homeless are known to frequent.

John Stensland and Ron Parker of Salem volunteered in a small group with Nick Rawling, a volunteer firefighter from Stayton. They checked out Pioneer Park as one of their survey sites and interviewed one man camping there.

"He's been unemployed for seven years, since he was 29. He said he was getting ready to go to Bend to stay," Stensland said. "He was facing harassment, people not wanting him around."

And the man was bipolar, which he said made it difficult for him to interact with other people, Rawling added.

"He's been traveling alone this whole time," Rawling said.

Rawling gave the man his coat and they offered him supplies. They also told him about the resources available at the fire station.

Jensen said the area is likely to see more homelessness because of the recession.

"There is a new face of homelessness where people have lost their jobs, they were evicted, or their home is being foreclosed on," Jensen said. "More people are 'couch surfing' or staying with friends and family."

The agency is also finding an increase in a younger population, the 11- to 23- year old age group, becoming homeless, she said.

For Fery, life has always been hard, regardless of the economy. She dropped out of high school in the ninth grade and has struggled to make ends meet since. But she takes it day by day and her family is her support system. She's proud of her 20-year-old married son, a Navy man.

"It's been pretty hard. At least I've had my friends and family," Fery said.

Data for 2010's homeless count is still being compiled, Jensen said.

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