



Raising the community's awareness of homelessness

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CENTRAL OREGON HOMELESS SEEK SHELTER WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bend, OR - Today the Homeless Leadership Coalition provided the information collected from its annual homeless count, conducted Thursday, January 29, 2009. Since the inception of the count in 2006, the greatest number of individuals self-identified as homeless occurred this year. 2237 persons self-identified as homeless, 11 percent more than in 2007. Similar to the three counts conducted previously, three out of four self-identified homeless came from families. Results of the surveys can be found at the Homeless Leadership Coalition website, www.cohomeless.org.

The homeless count provides a snapshot of Central Oregon's homeless population in a 24-hour time frame. While it is not a comprehensive count, it provides valuable information to those serving the homeless, helps to educate the public about the growing issues of homelessness in our region and helps direct public policy planning and development.

A majority of the self-identified homeless came from two-parent families. Only 14 percent of the self-identified homeless had emergency shelter, a voucher providing a night's campground or hotel stay, or transitional housing. These community resources, along with many others, were at full capacity during this year's count. Julie Tapia, a resident at Bethlehem Inn, could not afford rent last year and moved her family into a motel. When her job could no longer support her family, she attempted to relocate and moved into a recreation vehicle until they could no longer afford either. Julia Tapia explained, "I consider myself a resourceful person, after exhausting what was accessible to me and caring for my family's daily needs, it took staying at the Bethlehem Inn to access the community resources more fully."

With community resources stretched thin, 53 percent of the self-identifying homeless were staying with friends or family the night of the count. As in all previous counts, a majority of those surveyed indicated they could not afford rent. Congruent with national reports, those surveyed also increasingly identified they were unemployed or lost a home to foreclosure.

Children, seniors and the disabled represented two-thirds of the self-identifying homeless individuals. Similar to the three counts conducted previously, two out of five self-identifying homeless were children. As many as 20 percent self-identifying homeless were disabled, greater than the previous annual counts. Although seniors consistently represent 8 percent of the self-identifying homeless individuals within the annual counts, seniors over 70 years of age increased 300 percent.

"To know there are over 800 kids who are homeless in our communities is heart-breaking. We must work toward reducing homelessness and assure that next year, after the count, we see a lower number of homeless individuals and families in Central Oregon," said Corky Senecal, the Housing and Emergency Services Director of NeighborImpact.