Volunteers for Victor Valley homeless count sought
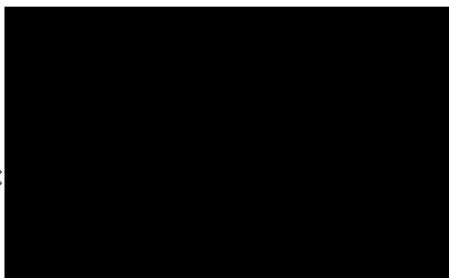
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Zerek finds warm shelter at the Emergency Warming Shelter in Victorville on Thursday. Volunteers are being sought to help count the homeless in the upcoming Point-in-Time Count on Jan. 24. It could help establish homeless assistance programs like the warming shelter. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

By Martin Estacio Staff Writer
Posted Dec 31, 2018 at 12:01 AM

A countywide survey of homeless persons, intended to help officials deal with one of the more intractable issues facing the High Desert and other cities, is set to take place Jan. 24.

Organizers are seeking volunteers to help with the Point-in-Time Count. From 6 to 10 a.m., teams of three will go out fulfilling assigned roles.

One will act as a lead responsible for ensuring ethics and confidentiality protocols are followed. Another will act as a counter, recording data using a web-based application. The last one will be a lookout who also keeps the team safe and hands out "incentive bags" after a count is finished.

Information collected will be included in the Annual Homeless Assessment Report, presented annually to Congress.

The report's findings can influence federal funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Continuum of Care Program Competition.

CoC awards community programs committed to ending homelessness, according to administrative supervisor Dawn Jones of the County's Office of Homeless Services.

In fiscal year 2017, over $2 billion was awarded for projects. San Bernardino City and County received over $10.4 million in funds.

The Time for Change Foundation was one of these projects. It helps homeless women and children "reach self-sufficiency by providing them with housing and evidence-based programs and services," according to the foundation's director, Vanessa Perez.

She stressed the importance of the count in continuing their mission.

"As a continuum of care recipient the Point-in-Time Count is critical for nonprofits when seeking financial support from HUD and the county," Perez said in an email. "San Bernardino continues to lack in funding for the city's most vulnerable populations and when we can capture the need, nonprofits like Time For Change Foundation can do what we do best, which is end homelessness."

The 2018 count report showed that more than 400 volunteers tallied 2,118 homeless individuals in total, an increase of 13.5 percent from 2017. Other increases included unaccompanied women and veterans. Unsheltered families jumped from 15 to 29, representing an increase of almost 100 percent.

Those identified as chronically homeless — a federal definition meaning someone who has experienced homelessness for at least a year or repeatedly while struggling with a disability — decreased by 18.5 percent, along with youths aged 18 to 24, which decreased around 7 percent.

Permanent supportive housing, which the County received most of its federal funds for, has been a proven solution for the first group, according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

According to their article, "investments in permanent supportive housing have helped decrease the number of chronically homeless individuals by 27 percent since 2007."

It has also been shown to improve their health and well-being and lower costs associated with the use of public crisis centers such as shelters, hospitals, and prisons.

Forty-eight percent of those identified in the 2018 count suffered from a chronic health condition, while another 46 percent suffered from a physical disability.

Other factors for homelessness noted in the report include increases in rent, unemployment, rising health care costs, domestic violence, mental illness, and substance abuse.

According to an Associated Press report, the nationwide Point-in-Time tally released by HUD showed a slight increase of 2,000 from 2017, totaling over a half-million homeless throughout the country. HUD identified cities along the West coast in California, Oregon, and Washington as driving the overall spike.

The jump represents the second consecutive increase after seven years of decreases.

In San Bernardino County, the 2018 count showed San Bernardino and Victorville as the cities with the largest homeless populations, representing almost 43 percent of the total.

Volunteers for this year's count will use a smartphone, or Wi-Fi enabled device, to conduct the survey.

Anyone wishing to sign up can go to the San Bernardino County Homeless Partnership website at www.sbcounty.gov/sbchp.

For additional information, contact Michele Bletcher at 909-386-8231 or mkbletcher@dbh.sbcounty.gov.

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