

Frigid air, economy greet sleepout

8th outdoor event held by advocates meant to call attention to plight of the homeless.

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Photos



(From left) Amanda Barnabas, director of community based programs, and Candy High, a fiscal director, play cards on a cold Wednesday night, Nov. 19, as they participate in National Homelessness Awareness Week. The Other Place and St. Vincent de Paul employees and activists sleep outside for an Homeless Awareness Event Sleep Out and Speak Out for the homeless.

DAYTON — Amid grim headlines and bleak economic projections, about 50 advocates for the homeless camped outside in 30-degree weather Wednesday night, Nov. 19, at St. Vincent de Paul Hotel as part of National Homelessness Awareness Week.

The event is meant to underscore the plight of 200 homeless people who use the hotel every night, said Tina Patterson, executive director of The Other Place, which hosts the needy.

"One night out doesn't make us understand homelessness," she said. "But it helps us."

While the homeless bedded down for the night in the shelter at 120 W. Apple St., advocates huddled up against the cold and pitched tents. They burned firewood in a portable fireplace and talked about the challenges facing social service agencies as the economy continues to want to tank. It's the eighth year of sleep outs for awareness, Patterson said.

She estimated another 20 homeless are somewhere in the city, trying to stay warm.

One who has escaped is Eric Brooks, 44, who now lives in supported housing. Brooks said he was homeless for two years in Dayton during a period of drug abuse. At one time, he slept in a parking lot. He was saved by an inpatient program, he said, that gave him a new start. He now works for Goodwill.

"I get support from my family now," he said.

Pam Overton, 46, originally from Muncie, Ind., is now in a new housing program at the Dayton VA Medical Center for single women, including homeless veterans.

She found herself on a slippery slope that led to the street after moving to Dayton to be near her daughter and grandson. She admits to poor choices prior to her homelessness, but now plans on getting a job and a new start in life.

"I won't rush myself," she said.

And then there's Chandie Dow, 35 and seven months pregnant. Separated from her husband and for a time lived in her truck. She stays in the shelter. She needs bed rest for her high-risk pregnancy. Social workers are trying to line up accommodations.

"To have a warm place to sleep and to be able to feed myself is so magnificent," she said.

Montgomery County Administrator Deborah Feldman gave a presentation on the county's effort to end homelessness, a five-year-old project facing serious headwinds from an uncooperative economy.

Toward its goal of having 750 supported housing units, there are 69 people living at River Commons, 144 E. Helena St., Feldman said. Half have jobs, she added. The county expects to open another 51 units in the next year.

Another goal of creating 1,800 units of affordable housing seems more distant, she noted. "This is one we are struggling with," she said.