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Samaritan

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services in need

Demand for aid for low-income families at Samaritan Inn, Rescue Mission on the rise

By JOHN SOUTHER
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Last year, the Samaritan Inn operated by the Roseburg Rescue Mission stayed full with 35 women and children living at the shelter.

At the same time, the number of food baskets handed out by the mission twice a week increased by 50 percent, rising from 100 boxes a month to 150.

With the local economy remaining flat and an unemployment rate hovering above 8.6 percent for the past 12 months, the demand for services provided by the mission and other area agencies remains high.

"We've seen a steady increase and we suspect that will continue during the new year," said Jeff Woods, the mission's executive director.

Although the mission may be best known for the 80 to 100 men who reside in an emergency dormitory and in a transitional housing unit, that isn't the core group provided assistance. Single moms with two or three children make up the largest group of residents seeking help from the mission.

Countywide, 30 percent of households are headed by a single parent, according to statistics compiled by the nonpartisan Children First for Oregon for the group's County Data Book 2003.

Of the 24,040 children who live in Douglas County — out of an overall population of 101,300 — 43 percent come from low-income families, according to the report. An even higher number of local children, 47 percent, are eligible to receive reduced or free lunches at school.

Statewide, one in three children live in poverty or near poverty. In Oregon, the poverty line is \$18,400 for a family of four, while near poverty is defined as less than twice the poverty level.

Layoffs in the timber industry and in other areas in the past year have increased the demand for social services, said Gillian Wesenberg, who heads Douglas County's Commission on Children and Fam-

County children & poverty

■ Percentage of children eligible for free or reduced lunches at school: 47 percent.

■ Of the eligible 11,299 children, only 4,952 take advantage of the program.

■ Of the 24,040 children in Douglas County, 10,353 live in low-income families. Seventeen percent live in poverty and another 26 are considered near poverty. Of the total, 6,621 live in families that receive food stamps and

6,840 are enrolled in the Oregon Health Plan.

■ Sixty-two percent of the babies born in Douglas County have mothers with a high school education or less.

■ In 2003, 8.7 percent of workers were unemployed.

■ For families with children, the median household income was \$39,774.

Source: Children First for Oregon

ilies. Long-term layoffs lead to a variety of problems, including increased alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence and mental health issues, Wesenberg said. The

loss in state funding for many social service programs has placed added pressure on other programs

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