

Homeless group eyes more study, housing

By Dave Varga
staff writer

Affluent Oakland County is home to many homeless. Even in the state's wealthiest county — and one of the wealthiest counties in the nation per capita — people end up on the streets. Some are handicapped, some are drug or alcohol users, some are victims of abuse and some are runaways. Some just can't afford a place to live.

More than ever, Oakland County's homeless are single women and children rather than men.

An Oakland County task force on homelessness and housing issues recently issued an interim report recommending, among other things, further study of current shelters to get a better estimate of the size of the problem.

"We do want to quantify the situation," said Dr. Robert Loecey, chair of the committee. "What we'd like to do is determine the numbers of beds and types of housing units that would be required to deal with homelessness in the future."

To get a handle on numbers, workers will be asked to register those visitors who show up at the existing shelters — Baldwin Human Services Center, Pontiac Rescue Mission, South Oakland Shelter and specialized shelters like Haven for women and children and the Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Center.

NOT ALL THOSE Oakland County shelters are full. In fact, the 430 or so beds available are only about 75 to 80 percent full on a yearly basis, Loecey said. Others who are homeless stay with relatives or friends while some stay right on the street, though few police report finding them regularly. Loecey estimated at any one given time 900 to 1,000 people are homeless in Oakland County.

Not everyone sees the need to get precise figures. "Those of us here on the front lines don't really care what the numbers are," said Noreen Keating, a member of the task force and director of Lighthouse, a Pontiac facility that provides emergency services. "We just know there is an overflow almost every night."

Part of the task force study will determine who is homeless and why. Nationwide trends, mirrored in local shelters, show growing numbers of women with children needing emergency housing, instead of single men.

IN ITS RECENT report, the task force also recommended finding a permanent location for the South Oakland Shelter, which provides beds for the night during colder months at a number of area churches each week. A permanent location, the report said, could help human service agencies work with clients in a more intensive way in helping the client's return to self-sufficiency.

County officials should also help promote new transitional housing fa-

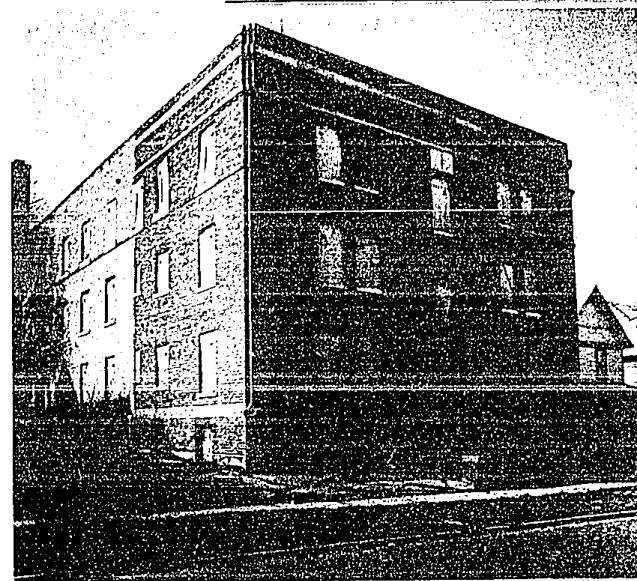
cilities, the step between emergency shelters and self-sufficiency, the report said. One such facility, a boarded-up apartment building in Pontiac, is being purchased by a coalition of volunteers led by Keating. Eventually, volunteers will renovate the building to make it livable as a low or no-cost apartment complex.

County officials also need to assist volunteers, non-profit groups and others in writing applications for federal, state or private grants to help pay for new transitional housing.

THE ONLY task force recommendation that would cost the county money is the creation of a trust fund to help pay for grant writers or supply emergency shelter funds, like a temporary hotel room, when shelters fill up and community money dries up.

The county would put up to \$150,000 in the fund, if it is matched by donations from municipalities or private, non-profit community groups. That proposal will go to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners about June 1 for approval, Loecey said.

Future reports by the task force will tackle preventing homelessness and encouraging permanent, affordable housing. "The biggest problem," Keating said, "is affordable housing in Oakland County."



STEPHEN CANTWELL/Herald photographer

This building on Cottage Street in Pontiac is expected to be re-developed as transitional housing, a step between emergency housing shelters and self-sufficiency. A task force on

housing for the homeless, convened by the Oakland County executive's office, calls for more such developments.

around Oakland

Readers for blind honored

About 100 area volunteers will be honored for their part in the Recording For the Blind program 2-5 p.m. Sunday at the North Park Square Clubhouse in Southfield.

The volunteers read books that are recorded on tape for visually handicapped.

Locally they read in Detroit's two studios where they have recorded approximately 225 books since the opening of the program here last

September. The program is run in this area from Wayne State University in Detroit and also on Opdyke Road in Bloomfield Hills. For more details about the program call 833-0048.

Computers for business users

Sophisticated business software will be the focus of a four-session, hands-on computer class starting Saturday at Oakland University's Rochester campus.

The class, which runs from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., costs \$115. It deals with dBASE III, Harvard Graphics and a utility package that assists in recapturing deleted files and determines the status of hardware. Bret Moeller, MBA and assistant to the OU president, will conduct the class. For more details call 370-3120.

Motorcycle courses held

The Motorcycle Safety Foundation is hosting motorcycle safety courses

for anyone from novice up to experienced riders at Oakland Community College's Farmington Hills and Auburn Hills campuses.

Inexperienced riders can take an 18- to 20-hour course with motorcycles furnished and classroom and range instruction given. An eight-hour performance course will include braking, countersteering, turning, speed judgment and more. An experienced rider course will be held on one day and is designed for those with large touring motorcycles and sport bikes.

Fees vary, as do classes times. Other locations are available. For

details call Vince Consiglio at 684-6576.

Fessler aide sets visits

An aide to state Sen. Richard Fessler, R-Union Lake, will make regular visits in each municipality in his district for an hour every month to give constituents a chance to share

views, problems and concerns.

"I'm taking government to the people," Fessler said. "This will be an easy way for me to find out what's on the minds of the people in my district."

The program, which began this month, will include visits to Beverly Hills (which includes the villages of Franklin and Bingham Farms and Southfield Township), Bloomfield Township, West Bloomfield and Bloomfield Hills.

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