

Lean times for local shelters in FoCo

By: Lincoln Greenhaw – Rocky Mountain Collegian

Posted: 12/10/09

The phones rang all summer at Catholic Charities Northern, a Fort Collins shelter, and this winter shows signs of being harder than the last for local charities providing help to the homeless.

"There has been a tendency in years past for numbers to fluctuate by season ... this year it didn't dip down. We've been consistently full year round," said Tony Casale, an intern at Catholic Charities, who is working on a master's degree in social work at CSU.

"We have been seeing more families and women coming to the shelter," he added.

The shelter, run by the charitable arm of the Catholic Archdiocese of Denver, also provides services ranging from "emergency food boxes to assistance with utility payments, assistance acquiring birth certificates and Colorado identification cards," Casale said.

The Larimer County United Way has also seen the number of people calling its 2-11 hotline for help with homelessness more than double, compared to this time last year. The hotline is a national program that connects people in need with services including food pantries, job training and housing programs.

Though the exact cause is tough to pinpoint, this year seems to have been particularly tough for women at risk for homelessness in Larimer County.

"The majority of the callers were adult women between the ages of 18 to 59," according to a Nov. 24 United Way press release.

Also, of the people calling, "more than half of them are unemployed," said Pam Davis, a spokesperson for the Larimer County United Way. "The impact of the economy is continuing to affect even people in this population."

Many of the people asking for help are what Davis and others at the United Way call the "hidden homeless."

"I'm specifically speaking of people who you wouldn't think of being homeless," Davis said. "They're the people who've never had to ask for help before and have never been in that

situation, who are maybe one paycheck away from being homeless ... and that could happen to anybody."

Not every shelter in Fort Collins is having trouble filling beds, however.

When asked if his shelter was full to capacity, Rev. Richard Thebo, founder of the Open Door Mission in downtown Fort Collins, replied "No, absolutely not."

Rev. Thebo also said that, if anything, the number of women seeking shelter at his mission had decreased in recent months.

But, this fall the shelter has experienced other problems.

"One thing that is decreasing is donations," he said.

is is the first Christmas that we didn't give out toys to all the children. We gave out food baskets. Food on the table is the big priority."

Casale also expressed a need for more help at Catholic Charities: "There are not enough resources," he said. "It's mainly issues with the ability for people to transfer into more stable housing."

"We're always welcoming more volunteers," he said.

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Media Credit: Brandon Iwamoto

John, center, who asked that his last name not be revealed, speaks with fellow Fort Collins homeless citizens Alvin Wheaton Jr., left, and James Miller, right, Jan. 26, 2008 at the Catholic Charities Northern Mission, located at 460 Linden Center Dr.