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McMinnville United Methodist ~ Trinity Lutheran*

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Community Compassion Update

By Joyce Wolcott

The economy is certainly affecting the lives of all of us, but even more so for those who were struggling prior to the downturn. For example, one typical (unfortunately) day in October we had more individuals applying for assistance than we used to receive in an entire month a year ago. But our God is also providing through the wonderful outpouring of resources from this community. For example, Albertson's donated 3 cases of Pediasure for a 10 year old girl, St. Barnabas is gathering and distributing toilet paper and paper towels to many front line service providers – these are items that people are not allowed to purchase with food stamps. St. James has provided an interpreter to assist with client meetings. Our God owns the cattle on a thousand hills (and all the hills besides – that's a Joyce corollary). We see it every day here at the COOP. Working together through programs like Compassionate Soup, our Community Partners, and the Community Compassion Brown Baggers, we are able to do so much more than if we sat down and tried to work on our own.

Our CCF Community Partners include:

First Baptist Church	St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
First Presbyterian Church	St. James Catholic Church
Give A Little Foundation	St. Vincent de Paul
Henderson House	Sunrise Church
Hope On The Hill	Thugz Off Drugz
Hope Reentry Services	Trappist Abbey
Housing Authority of Yamhill Co.	True Vine Christian Fellowship
Linfield Community Service	Yamhill Commission on Children and Families
McMinnville Covenant Church	Yamhill Co. Action Partnership (YCAP)
McMinnville School District Homeless Liaison Advocates	Yamhill Co. Community Corrections
Rainbow Family Services	Yamhill Co. Gospel Rescue Mission
Salvation Army	Yamhill Co. Prevention Programs
See Ya Later Foundation	You, the Compassionate Citizen

Homelessness in Yamhill County

By Joyce Wolcott

As a member of the steering committee that is helping to craft the county's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, I wanted to share some important information with you. The first Homelessness Summit on Sept. 25th was well attended with over 250 participants from all over the county. The purpose of this Summit was to unveil the county's draft version of the Plan (available on the county's website), to inform the public of this local crisis, to solicit input on the Plan and to let the public know how they could get involved.

To clarify the issue, I will quote briefly from the Plan itself, "In Yamhill County, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment is \$757. In order to afford this level of rent and utilities, without paying more than 30% of income on housing, a household must earn \$2523 monthly or \$30,280 annually. Assuming a 40-hour workweek, 52 weeks per year, this level of income translates into a Housing Wage of \$14.56. In Oregon, a minimum wage worker earns an hourly wage of \$7.95. In order to afford the FMR for a two-bedroom apartment, a minimum wage earner must work 74 hours per week, 52 weeks per year. Or, a household must include 1.8 minimum wage earners working 40 hours per week year-round in order to make the two-bedroom FMR affordable. For those receiving Monthly Supplement Security Income (SSI) payments, the outlook is even more bleak. Monthly Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments for an individual are \$637 in Yamhill County. If SSI represents an individual's sole source of income, \$191 in monthly rent is affordable, while the FMR for a one-bedroom is \$655."

Why should we be concerned? Homelessness is expensive for everyone. The core of the Plan is Housing First. "The methodology is premised on the belief that vulnerable and at-risk homeless families are more responsive to interventions and social services support after they are in their own housing, rather than while living in temporary/transitional facilities or housing programs. The average annual cost of one shelter bed is approximately \$8,067 – more than the average cost of a federal Section 8 housing voucher at \$6,000. The cost to place a child in foster care following a family split due to homelessness averages more than \$17,000 per year, per child. The cost of homelessness on a national basis is in the billions of dollars. It is in everyone's interest to end homelessness of families and individuals as quickly as possible. Evidence from national studies indicates that housing plus supportive services results in lower rates of shelter use, low hospitalization rates and shorter stays, and lower incarceration rates."

How is the COOP involved? First, through the Community Compassion Fund and our Community Partners, we work to prevent homelessness by averting evictions and we work to assist homeless folks into housing. Second, through the Community Compassion Brown Baggers, we are addressing the Plan's action steps with the county and working on ways that the faith community and county can work together. Third, we are working with the county to provide a central online community resource directory. Fourth, through the Compassion Network we are providing essential hygiene items and transportation.

How can I get involved? One important way is the upcoming Homeless Count on January 28th. In 2008, a count of people housed in temporary shelter situations revealed 364 people in this county were without permanent shelter and 256 of those were children. The problem is much more extensive – last year's count did not include people living under bridges, in swales, in their cars, in tents, or in county parks. In order to know how much affordable housing is needed in this county, we need to know how many people are homeless. On Jan 28, volunteers in each community will help conduct an in-depth homeless count. Teams are needed for each city in Yamhill County. So, join the team – count or be counted! For more info, contact Lee Means of YCAP (lee@ycap.info; 503-883-4172); or Rob Gardner, Prof. of Sociology at Linfield (rgardne@linfield.edu; 503-883-2677). For specific donations of goods or resources to the Compassion Network (would your group like to host a drive for a specific resource?), contact joyce@mac-coop.org.

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