



Project Homeless Connect Set for January 29 in Alton

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Hundreds of homeless people in Madison County will have the opportunity to take a step toward improving their lives by participating in the sixth annual *Project Homeless Connect*, scheduled for Wednesday, January 29 in Alton.

The outreach event will be held from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on the 29th at The Salvation Army, 525 Alby Street. *Project Homeless Connect* is conducted by the almost 100 member agencies of the Madison County Continuum of Care.

“Project Homeless Connect is not going to magically solve every issue experienced by the homeless in Madison County, but it is a start,” stated Madison County Chairman Alan J. Dunstan. “The event gives people a helping hand by offering counseling and a wide-range of social services, but it also offers some of the smaller things many of us take for granted, like a hot meal, a warm shower and clean clothes.”

Project Homeless Connect is designed to provide assistance to the men, women and children in Madison County who, as a result of economic hardships or other issues, are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The project helps those citizens to find out about help that is available.

“There are many reasons for homelessness in Madison County. Some are homeless due to mental health issues, others were devastated by the recession and have not been able to recover, and some who are homeless due to other issues,” stated David Harrison of Madison County Community Development. “*Project Homeless Connect* is not going to solve every problem, but it is designed to help. You can’t believe what something as simple as a haircut or a warm winter coat means to the men, women and children who are homeless.”

More than 100 volunteers and service providers will be present to assist in the distribution of food, beverages and clothing. Representatives will also provide a wide-

range of services that include substance abuse and mental health counseling, legal services, employment assistance and other social services. Those attending will also have the opportunity to receive medical exams and other health services. “And we also have care packages filled with toiletries and other items,” Harrison said.

Donations for *Project Homeless Connect* are still being accepted. “If a business or individual has items they would like to donate, we would appreciate their contacting us and we will arrange for a pick-up.”

"If Madison County residents are in contact with a family member or friend who is homeless, please let them know about *Project Homeless Connect* on January 29,” Harrison stressed. “Their attendance could be the first step in the road to recovery.”

Also on Wednesday, in association with *Project Homeless Connect*, for a 24-hour period social workers and volunteers will conduct *Point-In-Time*, a count of those who are unsheltered -- literally sleeping outside -- on the street, in a car or abandoned building on the night of the canvass. Information collected will provide important data for the plan to end homelessness.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires local communities to perform the Homeless Street Count every two years to demonstrate federal funding eligibility for many assistance programs, including emergency shelter operations as well as transitional and permanent supportive housing projects.

The 2013 *Point-In-Time* count showed Madison County with a homeless count of 581, including 278 children. “Unfortunately, those numbers are higher than in 2012,” Harrison said. “In 2012, the number stood at 411 homeless, including 205 children. Despite the efforts of the Madison County Continuum of Care and governmental departments, homelessness is increasing.”

Harrison stressed the importance of the *Point-In-Time* canvas. “It is very important that we obtain an accurate count as possible so we can send a message to HUD that poverty and homelessness are significant problems in Madison County that need to be addressed,” Harrison said.

“*Project Homeless Connect* and the *Point-In-Time* count are two very important events that will not only provide immediate assistance to those in need, but will provide long-term help,” stated Madison County Chairman Alan J. Dunstan. “The data collected on homelessness in Madison County will have a significant impact on the grants the county and local agencies use to provide these vital services.”

For additional information on *Project Homeless Connect* or the *Point-In-Time* Homeless Count, or to make a donation, contact David Harrison or Sarah Ray at Madison County Community Development, 618/692-8940.