

City pumps \$1 million into housing bottleneck

BY AMANDA WALDROUPE
STAFF WRITER

The Portland Housing Bureau announced this month how it plans to spend a \$1 million special allocation to address the rise in homelessness in Portland.

The money is being used to alleviate the housing bottleneck by placing homeless people currently in shelters or transitional facilities, into permanent housing, and to then use those empty shelter and transitional beds for people now living on the streets.

The Housing Bureau expects that 200 individuals or family members will be permanently housed, the incomes of 47 people will increase through job and employment training, and 105 beds in shelters and transitional housing will open for people currently living outside.

"It's a crisis time in our system," says Portland Housing Bureau Director Margaret Van Vliet, speaking about the economic pressures put on the homeless network of services.

"If we can help people who are a little bit stuck and ready to transition to the next level of housing...then we free up more space along the continuum," Vliet said.

"There will be people who will be permanently self sufficient because of this money," Traci Manning, Central City Concern's chief operating officer, said.

The \$1 million is funding two collaborations of service agencies, one serving homeless adults and the second serving homeless youth.

The adult collaboration is composed of seven social service agencies, led by the outreach agency JOIN. The other agencies are Central City Concern, Cascade AIDS Project, the Black Parent Initiative, the Salvation Army's female shelter, and Catholic Charities' El Programa Hispano and Housing Transitions Programs.

The collaboration received \$820,000. JOIN's executive director, Marc Jolin, said

JOIN will focus on placing people into permanent housing and provide rental assistance, move-in and moving costs, and other support services so people can stay in their housing.

Manning said Central City Concern will use its portion of the money to provide eviction prevention and rent assistance, move 40 people into permanent housing, and help 30 people find employment or apply for Social Security benefits.

The other agencies will provide housing placement for people living with HIV/AIDS, ethnic minorities, and homeless women.

The youth collaboration is made up of New Avenues for Youth, Janus Youth Programs, the Native American Youth and Family Center, and Outside In. The collaboration received \$180,000. \$51,000 of that money will infuse Janus Youth's outreach programs, which suddenly and unexpectedly did not receive a \$100,000 grant from the federal government earlier this month.

Dennis Lundberg, a Janus associate director, said the money will be used to rehire two full-time outreach staff he was forced to lay off after the federal grant fell through. Ken Cowdery, the executive director of New Avenues, said the remaining money will be used to house 20 youths and provide employment and job training services.

Mayor Sam Adams gave this one-time allocation to the Housing Bureau in April to address homelessness in the Portland's downtown core. The money was originally meant to increase the amount of shelter beds, but City Commissioner Nick Fish, who oversees the Housing Bureau, convened meetings of stakeholders, including social service providers, activists, law enforcement and business leaders. The group decided to use the money on permanently housing homeless people.

The stakeholders involved have perspectives about homelessness that are

often extremely disparate from each other.

For instance, the Portland Business Alliance has long advocated for the increase of shelter capacity, which is at loggerheads with Portland's emphasis on spending resources placing homeless people directly into housing.

Sources say the process of applying for the funding was no different than other proposal applications. What was slightly unusual, sources said, was the inclusion of very specific language regarding how many people were to be placed in permanent housing.

Jolin described the goal numbers the proposal process identified as "aggressive," but says they will not be impossible to meet because of the collaborating agencies' ability to leverage their existing services.

"What's exciting is that it is going to allow us to serve some people who are difficult to house," Jolin said. "Otherwise, we wouldn't have the ability to house them."

Given that the money is one-time funding, none of the agencies will be hiring additional staff. With the city expecting to lose revenue this year, it is unlikely that the money will be renewed.

"I am going to assume that the chances are not very high," said Van Vliet, although she said it was possible that the Housing Bureau would seek the money from community sources, such as local businesses, especially if outcomes are successful.

The city has also announced its winter shelter initiative, to begin in mid-November. Transition Projects will receive \$190,000 to operate an overnight warming center for single women living on the streets. The Salvation Army will receive \$180,000 to help operate winter emergency shelter and day services at its Harbor Light facility at Second Avenue and Burnside.

Will you know you are blessed?

by Meera Norris

Will you know you are blessed?
Even when the moments tick by
Like stress, stress, stress
Your heart is hurting
And your body's a mess
Will you know that you are blessed?
When they take everything from you
Tie you up, restrain you from making it out
You are tempted to take an unholy route.
With these kind of tears,
 this kind of struggle
You could teach the Pope to pray
These moments
Made you who you are today
With the angles you walk
With God you talk
She said "I know who really loves me now"
No rainbows or pots of gold
For those don't fit into this society's mold.
The standards they ask
The lies they feed us will no longer mask
The maggots they named fair laws.
When you breathe you know you are blessed
Masses of equal signs
 marching streets of Capitalism
Truth is in your hands
Saving a nation.