

Fairfax County Registers Chronically Homeless

Volunteers are visiting homeless at camp sites this week at the crack of dawn.

By James Cullum (Patch Staff) - February 26, 2013 11:43 pm ET

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"Boy, when you guys said 6 a.m., you weren't kidding," said Chris P. from behind his plywood front door at a campsite along Eisenhower Avenue near the border of the City of Alexandria and Fairfax County.

There was a harvest moon Monday morning, and it was cold, about 32 degrees, and dark. Five Fairfax County volunteers walked into Chris's campsite near Interstate 495 and Eisenhower Avenue with flashlights, hot coffee and clipboards.

"Good morning! Hello!" said volunteer Joe Drach as he walked up to a tent at the small campsite, which included a fire pit, a full clothesline and a three-foot mound of broken glass from smashed beer bottles. Feral cats scampered about with familiarity, and the ground was littered with dozens of empty cat food tins.

Chris, 51, was born in the District, graduated from high school and spent three-and-a-half years in the Marine Corps, he said. He built his hut out of plywood and plastic sheeting he found dumpster diving at a nearby construction site. He, his brother and a friend have lived at the site since October.

Chris stepped out with a headlamp over a ski cap, and took a cup of coffee with sweetener. Volunteers had recently visited to let him know to expect the Monday morning visit - part of a County project this week to register the homeless. Volunteers gave Chris toe warmers, a \$5 McDonald's gift card and a bagged lunch.

"I've been homeless for about 25 years," Chris said. "Spring and fall are great. It's winter and summer that suck."

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday about 200 volunteers will count, photograph and get the names and histories of the county's homeless for the first-ever Registry Week. The effort is part of the 100,000 Homes Campaign, which advocates offering housing to the homeless. Partners include the [Fairfax County Office to Prevent and End Homelessness](#), [New Hope Housing](#), [Pathway Homes](#), [Reston Interfaith](#) and [Volunteers of America Chesapeake](#).

Drach, who lives in Mount Vernon and is a member of [Good Shepherd Catholic Church](#), read from a list of 43 questions, which included "Have you ever been in jail?" and "If you aren't currently but could work full-time, what kind of work would you most enjoy doing?"

"I want to be a massage therapist," answered Chris, whose main source of income is cleaning car windows along Telegraph Road. "I had to panhandle yesterday for dinner. I just want to do something that makes people happy and get paid. But right now I got my sights set on UPS. They hire extra people every Christmas for the warehouse and sometimes they keep them after the season is over."

Drach was joined by Rev. Keary Kincannon, pastor of the [Rising Hope United Methodist Church](#); Pam Michell, director of [New Hope Housing](#); Lexalynn Hooper, a member of the New Hope Housing board of Directors and a county homeless case worker.

The volunteers were told to make observations of subjects noting if they looked "yellow" or "sick" or "smelled like they consumed alcohol," said Sherry Edelkamp, the South County corridor volunteer captain, to about 30 volunteers just after 5 a.m. Monday at the [South County Center](#) on Richmond Highway.

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Fairfax County, which has a 10-year goal to eradicate homelessness, saw an increase of its chronically homeless (those who have been homeless for more than one year or three times in the last four years) population in 2012 over 2011.

Single Individual Homeless Totals

Age Number of Homeless 2011	Number of Homeless 2012
18-34	192
35 - 54	174
55 and over	132
Total	666
	696

"It costs about \$13,500 per year for a bed in a shelter in Fairfax County," according to the [County's Office to Prevent and End Homelessness](#). "Compare this to \$10,500 for a house voucher for a two- or three-bedroom apartment."

Living Outside

It took between 15 minutes and a half-hour to complete each survey Monday.

Pete P., Chris' brother, said he became homeless after his wife died two years ago. The 54-year-old sleeps with his cats Tiger and Lucky, and has weekend work as a porter at Eastern Market.

Pete estimates that he could afford to pay \$400 a month for housing, he told the volunteers.

"I had a heart attack in 2001, and I've been trying to get on disability, but they keep saying that I'm too healthy for it. I applied five times," Pete said, adding that he suffered from frostbite last year.

"I think about getting out of here every day," Pete said.

The three men could each likely qualify for upwards of \$700 a month (depending on their previous employment history) from disability checks and Social Security, according to a county case worker, who rode with the volunteers and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The goal of the survey this week is to find out who is the most at-risk, said Michell. "The kind of stuff we saw today — you had to work to get to see it. It's not like an urban environment, where people are living in the streets," she said, adding that she hoped that the effort will garner greater community support, additional resources and housing opportunities for the county's homeless.

The volunteers will have a debriefing March 4 at the [Jubilee Christian Center](#) in Fairfax at 8:30 a.m.