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Article updated: 4/22/2014 11:55 PM

Report: Growing number of homeless kids in DuPage

By **Robert Sanchez**

A growing number of the homeless people in DuPage County are children, according to a new report.

The DuPage Homeless Continuum of Care, a group working to develop strategies to end homelessness in the county, has released the report that indicates 1,424 people used emergency shelter services in DuPage between July 1, 2012, and June 30, 2013. That's a slight increase compared to the 1,384 people who used local shelters the previous year.

Even more troubling to continuum members is that the number of children at the shelters increased from 250 in 2012 to 333 last year.

Meanwhile, the number of homeless students attending DuPage schools has climbed from 269 in 2006 to 1,287 last year, according to the Illinois State Board of Education.

"It's my belief that every child in this county should live safe from fear and have their own bed, just like my grandson does," said Carol Simler, the continuum's community outreach committee chairwoman.

Simler, who also is the executive director of DuPage PADS, said during a Tuesday presentation to the DuPage County Board that the number of homeless countywide is significant because of the cost to hospitals and the community.

"No one deserves to be homeless in DuPage County," Simler said. "And DuPage County does not deserve homelessness."

Mary Keating, DuPage's director of community services, said the best way to help homeless children is to find ways to support their parents so they could become self-sufficient.

"Is it employment services? Is it substance abuse issues?" said Keating, who serves as chairman of the continuum's leadership committee. "What are the barriers for those parents to get stable housing for their families?"

Simler said the 58 social services agencies and municipalities that are part of the continuum are working collectively to find answers.

Continuum officials plan to work with the county to provide more resources for homeless residents. In fact, the group will use data it has collected to develop a five-year plan to address the homelessness problem.

According to the continuum, things that are needed to combat homelessness include affordable housing, credit and budget education, jobs that pay a living wage, investment in homeless prevention services to keep people in

their homes, and health care and access to treatment.

Keating said the continuum's five-year plan will help officials decide how they should allocate resources to help various groups of people.

"The intervention for a young family may be totally different from an intervention for a Vietnam-era veteran," Keating said. "There is no single intervention that's going to solve it for all of those people. But there are multiple interventions that are appropriate for different profiles."

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