

Homeless numbers on the rise in Pasadena

By Janette Williams, Staff Writer

PASADENA - The number of homeless people in the city increased 16 percent in the last year, ending a four-year decline, officials said Wednesday.

According to the results of a count completed Jan. 28, there were 1,144 homeless in Pasadena - 911 adults and 233 children.

"We anticipated that the numbers were going to increase this year, the question was how much," said Joe Colletti of Urban Initiatives, the project's director.

"And after a 20-percent decrease in homelessness from 2005 to 2008, we're now experiencing a 16-percent increase from 2008 to 2009."

The overall homeless numbers are still down from a high of 1,217 in the 2005 count; the lowest number was 879 in 2000.

Most striking this year, Colletti said, is the increase in homeless two-parent families.

"They made up roughly one in four families in 2005, and it's half in 2009," he said.

The 2009 homeless count, which will be presented today at Pasadena Housing and Homeless Network's monthly meeting, doesn't ask the reasons for homelessness, Colletti said.

"This is more anecdotal, the data doesn't reveal this, but it's basically the economy," Colletti said of the higher numbers of two-parent households.

"People whose families are traditionally not homeless are becoming homeless in increasing numbers," he said,

adding that there is no data on where Pasadena's homeless come from.

"There's been an increase in two-parent families in our bad-weather shelter program, where they're allowed to stay continuously from December through March 15," he said. "After that, well that's an unknown."

One bright spot is that Pasadena is in line for a \$900,000 grant for homelessness prevention from President Barack Obama's stimulus package, said project planner Anne Lansing of the city's housing department.

"Prevention is, broadly, services and funding that will keep people at risk of homelessness in their housing," Lansing said. "That may take the form of short-term rental assistance, reduction in utility payments, loans to help pay back-rent."

Those behind with mortgages would not be eligible for help from that particular funding package, she said.

The grant will be a substantial boost to the current budget of about \$98,000 designated to help those about to become homeless, she said.

"We're very pleased and excited at being able to receive this money - we know it will be soon, but we don't know how soon," she said. "Pasadena is in a good place to use this money since we have existing programs in place - we're 'pen-ready' with checks ready to be signed."

The city has conducted annual homeless counts since 2005, although Department of Housing and Urban Development funding requires counts only every two years. The city was divided

into 16 zones, and each person was asked for basic information to avoid double-counting.

The HUD definition of homeless is living in a place not meant for human habitation, including cars, parks, sidewalks and abandoned buildings; being in an emergency shelter; and living in transitional or supportive housing for homeless people formerly on the streets or in emergency shelters. Families "doubling up" or people paying to stay in motels are not counted as homeless, Lansing said.

The count found no families living on the streets in Pasadena, Lansing said, and the Pasadena Unified School District's "Families in Transition" program identified only one household living in a garage on the day of the count.

As in the past, most homeless were men - 68.9 percent, or 628; 31.1 percent, or 283, were women; one in five homeless were children - 20.4 percent, or 233.

"We're not at a place where we can say with certainty that 100 percent of the increase is due to the economic downturn," Lansing said. "It's hard to say, and we're looking at other factors that could have affected it."

The increase, she said, is "unfortunate, but it's what we expected," and the demand for services creates greater competition for resources.

"But," she said, "we're hopeful the stimulus money will help us to deal with that aspect of it."