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**HEADLINE:** Closed shelters strain city's homeless services

# DAILY LOBO.COM

By Andrew Beale

## DAILY LOBO

On March 15, the Westside Shelter and Hunger Coalition will close until November, taking with it about 200 available beds for the homeless. Continuing the "Roofless " series about homeless problems in Albuquerque, I spoke with homeless services throughout the city to discover how this closure will affect them, as well as to learn what kinds of services they provide and what UNM students can do to help.

Shelter services Jeremy Reynolds, CEO and founder of the Joy Junction homeless shelter, said that when the Westside Shelter closes, Joy Junction will see more people asking for beds than it can accommodate.

"In a nutshell, what's happening is for four months a year, the City of Albuquerque funds a shelter in the old Westside jail. It can hold about 200 people," he said. "When it closes, on March 15, people come to us. We have to turn away these people onto the increasingly dangerous streets. "

Reynolds said Joy Junction may have to turn away 15 to 25 people a night. He said Joy Junction has no way to accommodate people left out in the cold when the shelter closes.

"There's nothing we can do. Nothing. We've asked the city what we can do to help them, but as an organization, we don't have the space," he said.

Joy Junction gives substance-abuse counseling, provides 300 beds a night and serves 10,000 meals a month, Reynolds said, but the problem is increasing beyond its capacity to help.

"If the economy keeps on as it does, we cannot handle the impact of that," he said.

## Health care

Albuquerque Health Care for the Homeless does exactly what its name suggests. AHCH Development Officer Paul Brown said homelessness presents unique problems for health care providers, and works to solve those problems.

"Not having a home greatly exacerbates health issues. Doctors need to understand how to respond to a patient without a home," he said. "We have our own doctors who have become experts at it. "

Brown said the Westside Shelter closing can cause people to stay on the street for a longer period of time, which in turn may worsen their health.

"We do have a few housing programs, but we're not a shelter, so we're not necessarily going to see a lot of overflow from that. It might cause people to live harder," he said.

Brown said medical students from make good volunteers for AHCH, but the clinic is not accepting volunteers right now. He said students can help out by gathering donations of money or socks.

"Socks are gold around here," he said. "(Not having socks) becomes a definite health issue, especially for those with diabetes. Sock drives might not be as glamorous, but they're definitely helpful. "

#### Children's issues

Cuidando los Niños is an Albuquerque-based shelter that focuses on children and families facing homelessness. Executive director Jaime Tamez said New Mexico has one of the largest populations of homeless families in the country.

"It's a crucial thing. We already have a shortage of beds," he said. "The *National Center on Family Homelessness* listed us at 47th out of 50 in the nation for child homelessness. Fifty is the worst. "

Tamez said the program works to help homeless families by providing shelter, care and a learning environment for children and families.

"We have an early childhood development center that serves 52 children a day. They're here for one year after they enter. It's only for families with children under 6," he said.

The organization has been lobbying in New Mexico's legislative session to secure more funds for children, Tamez said.

"The issue is that there's something fundamentally wrong with what the state is doing," he said. "On one hand, the government is saying children are a priority. On the other hand, they're cutting programs for children. People say they want to support those that need it most, but they're cutting money. "

Tamez compared the homeless situation in Albuquerque to the crisis in Haiti following the earthquake.

"In Haiti, there are 1.3 million homeless children after the earthquake. In the U.S., there are 1.5 million," he said.

UNM students can help by attending the New Mexico Summit to End Child Homelessness, on March 25 and 26 in Albuquerque's Indian Pueblo Cultural Center.

"(At the summit), we'll be looking at how we can mobilize. The ultimate goal is to end child homelessness," he said. "We're not going to solve this independently. We need to come together. "

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