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Homelessness up more than 50 percent

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Jennifer Frew (The News Herald)

Morganton - The results of the point-in-time homeless count in January have been compiled and recommendations were made concerning the homeless in Burke County.

The Burke County Continuum of Care Committee conducted the count over a 24-hour period from Jan. 29-30. A total of 148 homeless individuals were identified, an increase from 96 in 2007.

The report, prepared by David Collins, the point-in-time coordinator, contributed the increase in the homeless to the increase in agencies that participated in the count. Over

twice as many agencies assisted in 2008 than the previous year.

Collins' report recommends the Continuum of Care expand the number of agencies participating in the count. By including all agencies that assist the homeless, a more accurate count can be attained. This group should also organize itself to increase the community's awareness and involvement, said Collins.

In an effort to reduce and, hopefully, eradicate homelessness in Burke County, the report also recommends that city and county planners work in conjunction with local nonprofit agencies to develop a strategic plan.

The point-in-time homeless count is performed as a requirement of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The data is used to implement proper services and programs that address local needs, according to the report.

There are two categories of homeless people, according to the HUD definition: a sheltered homeless person, who lives in either emergency shelter or transitional housing, or an unsheltered homeless person, who lives in cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings or the streets.

Burke homeless statistics

Of the 148 identified in 2008:

68% Male

32% Female

23% Children under 18 years old

10% seriously mentally ill

32% diagnosable substance use disorders

12% Veterans

7% discharged in the past 30 days from the criminal justice, behavior health or health care system

13% have at least one child in their direct care

10% avoid shelters and are chronic homeless