

Project Homeless Connect links people with services

Some get coronavirus vaccines Thursday

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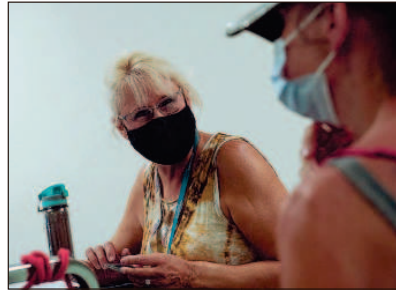
A tragic loss caused Daniel Morris to give up on himself, his job and home, which landed him on the streets.

"I lost my wife, and my heart was buried with her," Morris said. He's lived on the streets for five years

now, but he wants a new start.

"You've just got to learn to let go," Morris said. "I'm ready now."

The former manufacturing lead man went to Project Homeless Connect on Thursday to seek help to get a new job, put a roof over his head and take care of his medical needs. The event, held twice a year, took place in the fellowship hall at Central Christian Church, 410 S. Virginia Ave. Morris said that in ad-



Renee Beale, with Assurance Wireless, helps set up a phone for a homeless woman during Thursday's Homeless Connect Event at Central Christian Church.

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dition to finding out about how to get his medical issue addressed as well as pursue getting resettled

with a job and place to live, he also was able to get a free cellphone and a meal. "I got a lot out of it this

time," he said of Homeless Connect. It will make his life better as long as he follows through on the things he has to do to get off the streets, he said.

Project Homeless Connect is a one-stop shop for people who are homeless or those who are living in poverty and have lost or are about to lose housing or utilities, have other needs including mental health, and domestic violence education

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or assistance. The event is sponsored by the Homeless Coalition of Jasper and Newton Counties.

On Thursday, people also could get COVID-19 vaccinations given by the Joplin Health Department and COVID-19 tests.

"Several people have gotten COVID vaccines, so that makes the whole day worthwhile in my opinion," said Robin Smith, who chairs the Homeless Coalition. Otherwise, it can be difficult to get vaccines to those who are mobile. She said there usually are two Homeless Connect events held each year but that there hasn't been one

since January 2020 because of the pandemic.

"We're also surveying folks as they come in," she said. "We want to find out why they're homeless and what they've done to try to find housing, and then we can try to hook them up with some folks that can help them get housing, health care and some things like that." Information collected can be used to help understand and keep tabs on population and to write grants to fund services.

In the 2020 surveys, the majority of those who came for help said they were without a home because they lost their jobs. "We see a lot of people who have issues with mental health and things like that," Smith said.

"Many of those who do not have a permanent home are not without income at all,"

Housing assistance

FOR MORE INFORMATION on the State Assistance for Housing Relief program for those who have eviction notices or utility shutoff notices, call Catholic Charities of Southern Missouri at 417-624-3790. Those who are already homeless should first contact the Homeless Coalition at 1601 S. Wall Ave.

Smith said. "Some receive disability benefits or other types of aid. But they often do not have enough monthly income to afford housing and utilities and other household expenses on their own. Without a home, they don't have furniture or linens and those types of things. But there are organizations that can help with those needs once people are approved for housing assis-

tance and have found a place to live."

Because there has not been a homeless count since early 2020, Smith did not know how many homeless people Joplin has now, but there have been about 250 in the past, she said.

Callie Lankford, case manager supervisor for Catholic Charities, gave out information Thursday about housing assistance.

"We have homeless prevention services and that is for someone who is at risk of being homeless," she said. "We also have rapid rehousing services. Those are for persons that are homeless, chronically homeless. We also have the SAFHR (State Assistance for Housing Relief) program for renters right now and we are helping people to fill out the application for assistance.

"That program provides rent and utility assistance for eligible residents who have been impacted by COVID-19."

Services for those recovering from addiction are available at places such as St. Paul's Church, 2423 W. 26th St.

"We're here to let the population know that we're here, we see them," said Michelle Reeder, of the church.

"We offer Celebrate Recovery groups on Mondays that we're giving out information on because with this particular group, a lot of people are in recovery and we want them to know we are available to them right now. In addition, the church members gave out gift bags with water, snacks, hygiene products, socks" and other items.

Another provider at the

expo was Lafayette House, represented by Jamie Jesscoat.

"We have information for people who have experienced domestic violence that can be provided to the male or female population," she said. "And our shelter is for the female population and we offer residential and outpatient services."

In addition, everything from free haircuts to legal services, vocational rehabilitation services, Head Start and Early Head Start education program for families with children up to age 4, and several health care providers and housing agencies were available to those who attended. Employment services were provided at the expo by Joplin Job Center, Diversity Placement and Preferred Family Health Care Employment.