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By fax: Inverness, 860-7320;  
By fax: Crystal River, 564-3622  
By e-mail: citrus@sptimes.com

# CITRUS TIMES

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## County attempts to

■ Although a survey taken today and Monday will be a rough count at best, the effort is needed to receive funding and resources to fight homelessness.

By COLLEEN JENKINS  
Times Staff Writer

In an effort to better serve the county's homeless population, Citrus homeless advocates are setting out today and Monday to quantify for the first time how many people are without shelter.

The county's homeless coalition will conduct a

point-in-time survey, in this case a six-page questionnaire designed by the state homeless coalition to be handed out to those people known or thought to be homeless. Volunteers will target the county's three shelters, soup kitchens at churches and any spots where the homeless might seek work.

They will estimate Citrus' homeless population with the responses they receive both this morning and Monday morning. It will be a rough count at best, coordinators said, but the effort is necessary to receive funding and resources to fight homelessness.

"This is something that we've got to do," said DuWayne Sipper, executive director of The Path homeless shelter.

# count its homeless

He's also an executive board member of the Mid-Florida Homeless Coalition executive board, which serves Citrus, Hernando, Lake and Sumter counties. All member counties plan to conduct similar surveys.

"It helps us get points when we go down to put our grants in," he said.

But Sipper and other coordinators said the survey is worth more than the numbers it will produce. Survey organizer Mary Lee Cubbison said service providers are trying to learn more about who constitutes the county's homeless population.

The survey asks questions about an individual's last home, family, employment, income and what

caused his or her homelessness. The possible reasons are plentiful: unemployment, divorce, eviction, mental health or physical problems, lack of child care or transportation.

"There's so much misunderstanding about who (homeless) people are," said Cubbison, the county's director for the Marion-Citrus Mental Health Center.

It's not that the county ignores the problem, she said, but it isn't as immediate or visible a concern as it would be in more urban areas. Still, that doesn't mean Citrus is without its share of homeless people, she said.

"There are visual cues everywhere that there's a

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homeless problem," she said.

The survey also asks people what types of services they use or need, such as emergency shelters, rental assistance, medical and dental care, child care and legal help. Those answers will help plug providers into the gaps in county ser-

vices.

They already know one, Cubbison said. Citrus has no transitional housing, a service particularly needed for those who complete Marion-Citrus Mental Health's 90-day substance abuse rehabilitation program. When participants come out of it, they often have no money, no job and nowhere to live, she said.

"If we can get enough people to

answer (the questions), I think we'll get some good information," she said.

Sipper said he won't be disappointed if the responses are few. He's got 10 beds at The Path, and they are always full.

"I don't need a survey," he said. "I already know what's out there. My phone rings all day long."

— Colleen Jenkins can be reached at 860-7303 or [cjenkins@sptimes.com](mailto:cjenkins@sptimes.com).

