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City's homeless count jumps 5%

Written by

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Indianapolis' homeless population rose 5 percent this year to its highest level since 2008 -- and the numbers likely would have been higher still were it not for millions of federal stimulus dollars, advocates for the homeless said Thursday.

The Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention, which one day each winter sends out teams of social workers and volunteers to count the homeless, said that number was 1,567, up from 1,488 in 2010.

This year's count, taken Jan. 27, was the second in a row to show an increase and came after four consecutive counts showing declines in homelessness.

It's the largest percentage jump since 2003, even though the number of families in shelters was down substantially, from 191 in January 2010 to 155 a year later. Timothy Joyce, the coalition's executive director, credited federal stimulus money for the decline.

Since October 2009, when local agencies started receiving the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program money --

Indianapolis' share of the \$1.5 billion pool was \$3.9 million -- 473 families consisting of 872 people who were either homeless or on the verge of it received money and some kind of training, often job training, and are currently housed.

A temporary, one-time fix, the program was not designed to help the so-called chronic homeless, people who've been in and out of shelters for years and often have substance-abuse problems or mental illness. Rather, it's for people with "low to moderate barriers" to having a roof over their heads, said Michael Hurst, the coalition's program director. "It's short-term money for people who may have lost their job."

The fund is not exhausted, but it's shrinking. Through March, according to a status report issued in April by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Indianapolis had \$1.5 million left.

"We are hopeful that government leaders,

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private individuals and charities will recognize that the need is still there," said Joyce.

"We also hope the economy begins to pick up and more jobs are created so that access to housing and supportive services can become a reality for our most vulnerable neighbors -- and we can once again reverse the growing number of homeless across our city."

HUD, which administers federal dollars aimed at addressing homelessness, requires communities receiving funds to count their homeless at least every two years during the last two weeks of January.

The first count was in 2003, a year after the city adopted its "Blueprint to End Homelessness," a 10-year initiative that in its 10th year has not ended homelessness but has reduced it significantly. The 2003 count found 2,230 homeless people.

Call Star reporter Will Higgins at (317) 444-6043.

By the numbers

The tally of Indianapolis' homeless population has risen for the second consecutive year. Here are the annual counts:

- » **2011:** 1,567.
- » **2010:** 1,488.
- » **2009:** 1,454.
- » **2008:** 1,524.
- » **2007:** 1,868.
- » **2006:** No count.

- » **2005:** 2,080.
- » **2004:** No count.
- » **2003:** 2,230.

Source: Coalition for Homelessness Intervention and Prevention

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