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## Without outreach, homeless may be more helpless



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By **Alan Johnson**

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

For more than a decade, Ken Andrews has reached out to the hidden homeless of Columbus, scouring woods and ravines and looking under bridges, in abandoned buildings and broken-down cars to find and help society's throwaway people.

"Ken is the go-to guy when it comes to the homeless in Columbus," said a mental-health outreach worker who sometimes accompanies Andrews on his rounds. "He's like the sergeant who knows the ropes and the drills."

But unless something changes quickly, a budget cut will force Andrews out of his job next month as homeless-outreach coordinator for the Open Shelter. Columbus Neighborhood Health Centers, the organization that paid Andrews' salary through a grant, had to tighten its belt and decided to refocus its shrinking resources on health care inside the organization.



TOM DODGEDISPATCH

Homeless veteran **Joseph Garrett** Winters, left, talks with outreach coordinator **Ken Andrews** at a camp near the Miranova condos.

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So the 800 or so homeless folks who Andrews tends to will be voiceless and helpless, their champion sent to the sidelines.

Andrews frets about what happens to "his people." There are other programs assisting the homeless, but the outreach staff assigned to the transient population is stretched paper-thin.

"We go out and reach a population that isn't in a social worker's face. If that is gone, these people are going to be lost," Andrews said one morning recently while making his rounds of homeless camps ringing Downtown.

At a homeless camp in the shadow of the luxurious Miranova riverfront condominiums, Andrews visited several people living in tents and makeshift shelters.

Joseph Garrett Winters, a homeless man who Andrews sees regularly, said lack of outside contact may cause trouble in the camps.

"You'll have a lot of people going after each other," he said. "We have to look after each other. We are our brother's keeper."

Thomas J. Horan, executive director of Columbus Neighborhood Health Centers, the agency that funded the homeless outreach, said the cutback was necessary so that the agency can live within its means and continue providing basic services. The agency may work with other organizations to try to keep the outreach program afloat, he said.

"We're OK right now, but we're hanging on by a little thread," Horan said.

Kent R. Beittel, director of the Open Shelter, said he understands cutbacks are necessary, but he's continuing to "look under every rock to find \$40,000 for this program."

It could hardly come at a worse time, Beittel said.

With the Ohio economy stalled despite assessments that the recession is over, the number of people seeking free dinners from the Open Shelter has doubled. Beittel said the shelter served 29,000 meals through the end of October this year, compared with 16,000 during the the same 10-month-period last year.



TOM DODGE DISPATCH

**Ken Andrews worries about what will happen to "his people" if no one is around to check on them.**



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