

# Figures rise on homeless in rural areas

By Lee Strong  
Staff writer

Officials must unite in addressing the homelessness problem in the Finger Lakes region if they expect to solve the growing situation.

That was the main message 175 people heard during the all-day workshop, "Homelessness in the Finger Lakes: Building a Community Response," which was held Friday, Jan. 24, at the Presbyterian Church, 24 Park Place, Geneva.

The workshop was sponsored by the Homeless Task Force of Ontario, Seneca, Wayne and Yates counties, which includes the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry.

According to Kevin Hennessy, FLOSM's justice and peace director, the workshop's goal was "to build awareness of the problem and to try to draw people into looking at how we can respond to the problem given our limited resources."

The workshop drew concerned citizens as well as people from government and social service agencies, churches and community groups. The all-day program included sessions on housing emergencies, single parents in housing crises, federal and state housing budgets, and model responses that have succeeded in meeting some of the needs of the homeless.

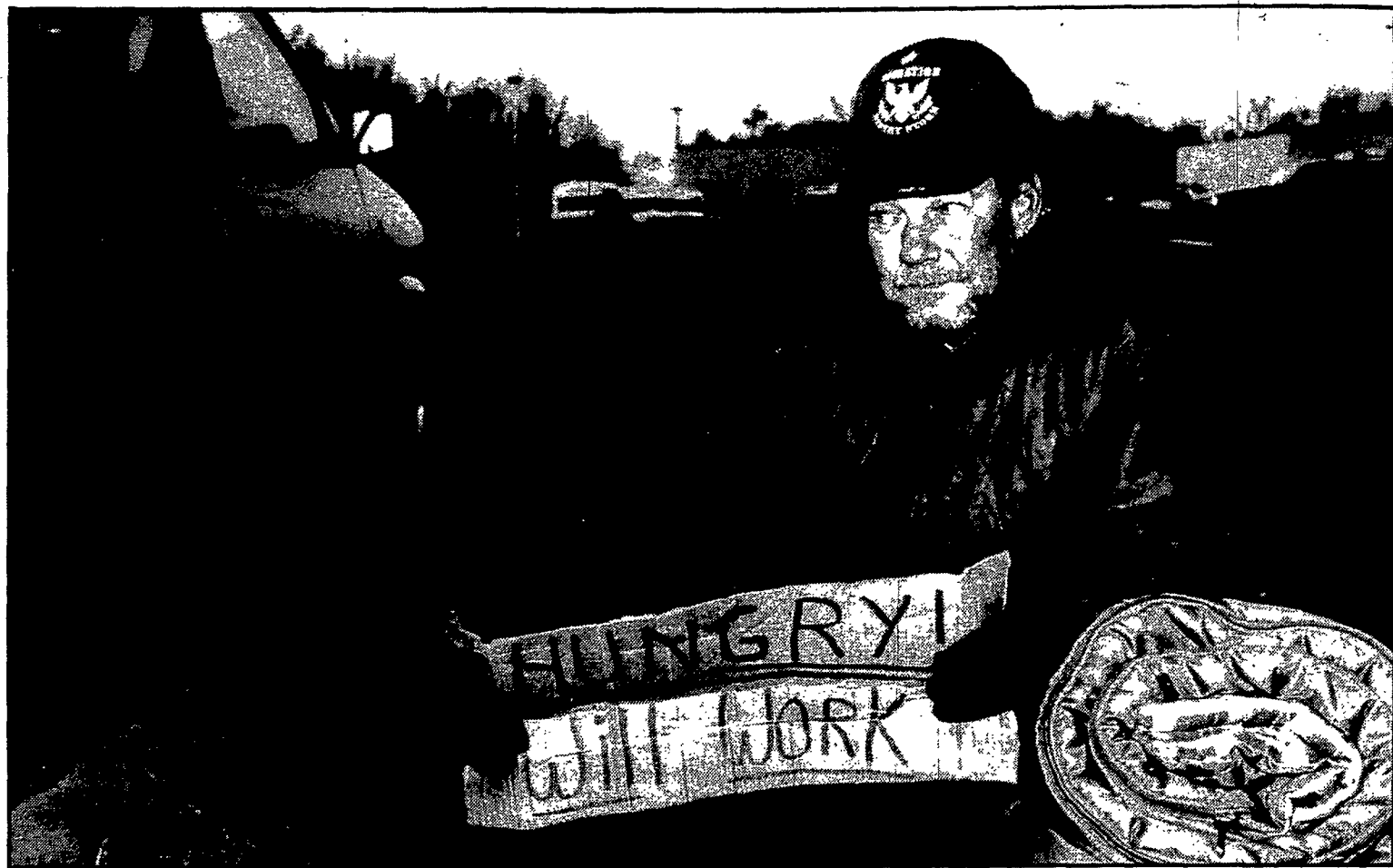
The extent of that problem in the Finger Lakes region was revealed in part by a survey the task force conducted, Hennessy said. The survey showed that between the falls of 1990 and 1991, approximately 1,200 people in the region were homeless or were suffering a housing crisis.

The survey also pointed out that while approximately 1,200 subsidized housing units were available in the four-county region, all the units were already filled, and that the agencies overseeing the units had a waiting list of nearly 1,300 individuals and families.

Many of those individuals and families are currently living in substandard housing or in overcrowded conditions, Hennessy said. Others are facing the loss of their homes or having utilities shut off, he added.

However, the survey does not show the full extent of needs, noted Susan Blowers, director of the Ontario County Department of Housing and Community Resources and one of the workshop's organizers.

"No one knows how many people



Susan Miller

Jerry Howard sits along Routes 5 and 20 in Canandaigua during mid-November, 1991. Since then, Howard has been placed in a motel by the Ontario County Department of Social Services.

are really homeless in the Finger Lakes," Blowers said. "But it is increasing."

One of the problems of assessing the extent of homelessness in the region is that the standard image of the homeless is an urban one that does not fit the situation in rural areas, noted Shelly Nortz, director of the New York State Coalition for the Homeless and the keynote speaker during the workshop. She observed that homelessness in rural areas "is in some respects more of a hidden problem, and in some rural areas it is a more prevalent problem."

"The homeless are not likely to be found on a steam grate or a city street," Nortz said. "They're found in a barn or in a car or in a shed without heat."

Nortz noted that homeless populations in "most of the rural counties generally have a higher rate of growth than the state-wide rate, especially in the family category."

An additional problem, Nortz observed, is that because the rural poor are not as concentrated as the homeless population in urban areas, "the numbers are not large enough in any one place to have a shelter."

And even areas that appear to better off economically have a problem, noted Susan Miller.

Miller, a parishioner of Canandaigua's St. Mary's Parish, has written a report on homelessness in Canandaigua — a community that is increasingly affluent, she noted.

Yet, in her report — a version of which was delivered at the workshop — Miller reported that:

- between December, 1990, and December, 1991, the Ontario County Department of Social Services saw a 20.3 percent increase in the number of applicants for emergency shelter over the same period from 1989-90;

- the DSS processed 177 applications from May, 1991, to November, 1991, alone;
- the Canandaigua Salvation Army saw a 25-percent increase in the number of people served last year compared to the previous year;

- between January and June, 1991, the Community Action Program in Canandaigua served 47 people who had no shelter and 59 others who were potentially homeless.

And in light of the troubled economy and state-budget cuts, the situation is likely to get worse, Hennessy observed.

"I think practically speaking, there's going to be more people who can't make ends meet," Hennessy predicted.

"To the extent that welfare benefits are reduced, then we're going to see more and more people fall from at risk to homelessness.

"There's not much left of the safety net after we've shredded it the way we've shredded it the last few years," Hennessy added.

One way to respond to the problem, Blowers suggested, is for church groups to get involved and to cooperate with social service and government agencies.

"I think we need groups working together, not just non-profit and government agencies, but also the churches," Blowers said. "The churches can do so much more."

Blowers noted that churches could begin by aiding their own members who run into problems. Beyond that, churches could cooperate with agencies to open emergency shelters.

"To put it squarely back in the lap of welfare and the government is not a solution," Miller said. "It requires more than finger pointing to social service agencies. It's not a delegation of authority. It's assuming a personal sense of responsibility."

## Northeast schools will register children for 1992-93 school year

ROCHESTER — Schools in the Northeast Quadrant will hold re-registration for the 1992-93 school year from Feb. 7-12.

Each of the four quadrant schools to open next year — Christ the King School, 445 Kings Highway S.; St. Ambrose, 31 Empire Blvd.; St. Andrew's, 901 Portland Ave.; and St. Margaret Mary's, 400 Rogers Parkway — will hold an open house on Thursday, Feb. 6, from 1-8 p.m.

Parents and children are invited to talk with teachers and other parents during the open houses. Information will also be sent home with each child.

Northeast school parents were sent information and re-registration forms on Friday, Jan. 24, according to Father George Norton, public information officer for the Rochester diocese.

Parents must complete the re-registration forms and return them by Feb. 12 to the school their oldest child attends. A \$50 non-refundable tuition fee should be enclosed. Checks should be made payable to the "Northeast

Quadrant."

Quadrant officials noted that the tuition fee may be applied toward 1992-93 tuition. School families may also apply for tuition assistance.

The northeast's proposed tuition rates for 1992-93 are as follows:

Parish-sponsored child: \$1,350 for one child; \$1,750 for two children; and \$2,150 for three or more children.

Non-parishioner child: \$1,715 for one child; \$2,135 for two children; \$2,555 for three or more children.

Pre-school programs will be available at all four schools: Tuesday-Thursday for 3-year-olds, and Monday-Wednesday-Friday for 4-year-olds. The two-day program costs \$475, and the three-day program costs \$625.

Parents must list two choices when enrolling their children. Families will be notified where their children will attend school between March 2-6.

Parents may contact their children's current school principal for information.



A lean-to in the woods off Routes 5 and 20 provided shelter for one homeless person in Canandaigua.