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## Expo connects homeless with services

Drive generates more than 20,000 diapers for families grappling with domestic violence.

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Amber Martin, with 18-month old daughter Aayla Alonzo, talks with Family Promise of East San Fernando Valley Executive Director Jacqueline White about housing during the Social Service Program on Homeless Connect Day at the Glendale National Guard Armory. Martin has been homeless less than one year. (Raul Roa/Staff Photographer / December 13, 2010)

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By Megan O'Neil, [megan.oneil@latimes.com](mailto:megan.oneil@latimes.com)  
December 15, 2010

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Representatives from more than 50 nonprofit organizations and public agencies on Tuesday assembled at the Glendale National Guard Armory to provide a one-stop shop of

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resources for the homeless.

Homeless Connect Day, organized by the homeless shelter Path Achieve Glendale, is an opportunity to make contact with and assist those living on the fringes of society, organizers said.

"We are trying to connect with as many homeless people as we can by providing as many onsite services as we can," said Christina Hanna, a social services assistant at Path Achieve.

The annual event is scheduled to coincide with the start of the winter season, which is particularly hard on the homeless, said Natalie Profant Komuro, executive director at Path Achieve. Individuals living on the streets are vulnerable to hypothermia, chronic health problems, robbery and sexual assault, she said.

And for the chronically homeless, seeking assistance is hard.

"For many people, it is daunting to go into an office," Profant Komuro said. "Some of the folks that we help get a lot of anxiety about standing in line, they don't know how to fill out the forms; they become easily frustrated. So this is an opportunity for us to be really available to them in a way that is not threatening."

The event also marked the conclusion of a citywide diaper drive that generated more than 20,000 donated diapers. Organized by the Domestic Violence Task Force, a coalition of Glendale public officials and community leaders, the two-week drive attracted donations from dozens of churches, schools, community groups and families, Profant Komuro said.

The diapers were distributed to families on Tuesday.

Agencies represented at Homeless Connect Day included the Verdugo Jobs Center, AIDS Project Los Angeles, Neighborhood Legal Services and the Housing Rights Center. Nurses from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health administered free flu shots, and volunteers served breakfast.

Clients browsed through stacks of donated winter clothing, trying on shoes and jackets.

There was also a high-tech component to this year's event. Mark Horvath, a television-executive-turned-homeless man-turned-social-media-entrepreneur, was there to help clients create e-mail, Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Horvath is the founder of the Invisible People project, a website dedicated to documenting on film the experiences of homeless people.

He recently launched a project, We Are Visible, that helps the homeless digitally connect with services, and with one another.

The project includes a Twitter account and Facebook page where users can share information about jobs, social services events and shelters. It also allows users to communicate with one another, giving them a sense of community.


"What I am building is virtual case management," Horvath said.

Rd Plasschaert is an active user of the We Are Visible Twitter and Facebook accounts, which she credits with saving her from landing on the streets. In August, Plasschaert was forced from her residence in the Mt. Washington neighborhood of Los Angeles. A disability left her without work, and without an income.

Just days before she was forced to move, she found Horvath through the We Are Visible Twitter feed. He promptly directed her to Path Achieve, where she lived for a few months before moving in with a friend.

The virtual community that is being built up around the project gives a lifeline for those who are trying to survive homelessness, she said.

"You start thinking about yourself as gutter trash, and no homeless person should feel like gutter



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trash," Plasschaert said.

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