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FREE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

Salem tucks homeless into motels, hoping to avoid virus

The ARCHES Project is spending around \$67,000 per week to house homeless people who at a higher risk should they contract COVID-19. The agency said they committed to operating the program as long as needed.

By Saphara Harrell - Salem Reporter

April 13, 2020 at 9:01am





Leslie McCallister and her family are currently staying at a Salem motel being used to house the homeless. McCallister was evicted from a former residence after losing her job in insurance. (Amanda Loman/Salem Reporter)

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KayLynn Gesner, Lucy Briseno and Ali Stephens walked down the motel hallway Friday morning, knocking on doors and handing out paper detailing a curfew for the new guests.

The outreach workers from the ARCHES Project have shifted gears in recent weeks, knocking on motel doors instead of dropping by tents or warming shelter sites.

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Leslie McCallister passed the huddle of women, walking down the hall in leggings printed with a galaxy pattern.

She has been staying in a motel for two weeks with her three children, partner and their three dogs.

Her family is one of 81 housed in motels last week. The ARCHES Project is paying for the motel stays with money from the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department for people who have tested positive for COVID-19 or those with underlying medical conditions who are more vulnerable to the virus.

People must be referred through a hospital, a service provider or individuals can contact ARCHES directly to request the motel shelter.

McCallister, who is five months pregnant, moved into her home in November, nearly a year after she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

Before her motel stay, she had been living out of her car with her family after losing her job as an insurance broker.

"It's a blessing that corona did happen, because there was nowhere else we could go," she said.

McCallister has plans to get into a home, but she said that's currently at a standstill because of the pandemic.

ARCHES started placing homeless people into motels on Thursday, March 19, and now is spending around \$67,000 per week to cover the costs.

The agency is placing people in five motels throughout Marion and Polk Counties.

Program manager Ashley Hamilton said her agency hasn't determined how long the effort would go on.

"We are committed to operating this program for as long as is needed in response to COVID. On the individual resident level, we pay for one week at a time with the opportunity for renewals," she said in an email.

A few weeks ago, the agency started housing around 40 individuals, and that number jumped to 113 last week.

In Portland, homeless people are being housed in two motels for a total of 46 rooms, according to [The Oregonian](#).

Portland is also opening [three outdoor homeless camps](#) to try to contain the spread of the virus.

In March, Salem re-opened camping in unimproved areas of Wallace Marine Park and Cascades Gateway Park.

The emergency declaration that paved the way for open camping is set to expire on April 28. It's unclear where the more than 200 campers will go when it does.

In March the Salem City Council moved forward with a ban on sitting or lying on public sidewalks during the day once certain provisions were met. Discussions about how to meet those provisions have stalled as the city tries to address COVID-19.

As of Friday, there were 246 positive cases in Marion County, the third highest in the state behind Washington and Multnomah Counties. Nine people have died from the virus in Marion County.

Have a tip? Contact reporter Saphara Harrell at 503-549-6250, saphara@salemreporter.com or @daisysaphara.

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FREE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

PHOTOS: ARCHES places homeless people in motels to slow the spread of COVID-19

The ARCHES Project started placing people in motels on March 19, and last week had 113 housed across five motels in Marion and Polk Counties.

By Amanda Loman - Salem Reporter

April 13, 2020 at 1:00pm





ARCHES project outreach workers Ali Stephens, left, and Lucy Briseno talk with motel resident Diane Murphy about a newly instituted curfew at a Salem motel being used to house the homeless on Thursday, April 9. (Amanda Loman/Salem Reporter)

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Last week, The ARCHES Project housed 113 people in motels to help those more vulnerable to contracting COVID-19.

Program manager Ashley Hamilton said her agency is committed to keeping the program running for as long as needed to respond to the health crisis.

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ARCHES is also sending outreach workers to the newly formed camps in Wallace Marine Park and Cascades Gateway Park.



Resident Jennie Lockling accepts a flier on a newly instituted curfew from outreach workers Ali Stephens and KayLynn Gesner at a Salem motel being used to house the homeless on Thursday, April 9. (Amanda Loman/Salem Reporter)



ARCHES Project outreach worker KayLynn Gesner talks with Dennis Sherry, who is staying at a Salem motel being used to house the homeless, about an upcoming curfew on Thursday, April 9. (Amanda Loman/Salem Reporter)



Leslie McCallister and her family are currently staying at a Salem motel being used to house the homeless. McCallister was evicted from a former residence after losing her job in insurance. (Amanda Loman/Salem Reporter)



Motel resident Derrick Hayden talks with outreach workers about an upcoming curfew at a Salem motel being used to house the homeless on Thursday, April 9. (Amanda Loman/Salem Reporter)

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