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Weekend floods displace homeless

By Audrey Wong

FAIRFIELD - On Friday, Mel Green slept in his camp on the bike trail behind Home Depot. On Saturday Green was floating in water up to his chest.

Green's tent acted like a raft and he estimated he drifted an eighth of a mile in Saturday's floods until he struggled to Mission Solano, which serves the homeless.

Since the flooding, the number of homeless seeking shelter at Mission Solano has almost doubled. Usually Mission Solano provides about 50 beds at one of the churches that house the homeless for a night. But this week Mission Solano has made accommodations for as many as 90 people, said Raymond Courtemanche, shelter director.

The deluge and floods ruined homeless campgrounds, Green said. People usually sleep in dense bushes by the bike trail or the tules off Beck and Pennsylvania avenues.

"It's still kind of muddy out there, not really sleepable," Green said.

The disaster also damaged Rockville Bible Church, where Mission Solano clients stay on Thursdays, Courtemanche said. But congregation at Rockville Bible Church still served dinner at Mission Solano Thursday evening.

Courtemanche has asked other churches to participate in Mission Solano's program. Mission Solano planned to use its community outreach center as a sleeping area Thursday night. And the displacement of people isn't restricted to Fairfield - Vacaville police called Courtemanche asking for advice on how to help five families who need shelter.

Fortunately Mission Solano was prepared for the increase. In the beginning of December, shelter officials noticed they were turning away as many as two dozen people a night, said Ron Marlette, executive director. So the shelter found ways to help more people, Marlette said.

Marlette expects the increase to stay high for many weeks. Mission Solano is providing emergency food boxes, clothing and household goods to those whose homes and lives were damaged by the floods.

Even in the wet, cold conditions some choose to remain outside - 15 families were flooded out but refused to stay at Mission Solano, said Ronald Leaks, lead shelter supervisor. Many homeless people would rather fend for themselves than rely on others, Green said. But the shelter is good for emergencies.

"I'm glad it's here, I'm dry," Green said.

For information on how to offer your church as a nomadic shelter or to offer other support call Mission Solano at 422-1011 or log onto www.missionsolano.org.

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