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Program Helps Homeless Recover from Surgery Off the Streets

By **Ian Cull**. Published Thursday, April 14th, 2011



Judy Ettenhofer lived with her sister in Yakima until last summer, when her sister died. Afterward, she couldn't afford to keep the house and became homeless.

"She was the one who had the income and stuff, I just stayed there and took care of her," she said.

Her situation continued to get worse, as her troubled right knee stopped supporting her. Ettenhofer needed knee-replacement surgery but couldn't find a place to recover after, the hospital was too expensive.

That's when she found the Yakima Neighborhood Health Services Respite Program.

Ettenhofer said, "if you do have the surgery, and have no place to go, it just wouldn't have worked out. So I really appreciate it, they've been really helpful."

The program helps homeless people who are well enough to leave the hospital, but sick enough to need their own place to recover.

The Community Outreach Coordinator Annette Rodriguez said, "we're going to hopefully shelter somebody who's homeless, who probably lives in their car, on the street, or is staying at the mission where they won't be able to get the recuperation time they need."

The Respite program serves six people in these apartments in downtown Yakima, but Rodriguez says there's still a need for more housing, and that there are actually people waiting in the hospital to get in.

Rodriguez said, "as soon as somebody exits, it could take a day or two. The next day we've got somebody waiting to come in."

Judy Ettenhofer doesn't know how much longer she'll be able to stay here, and is looking into permanent housing options. She credits the Respite program with helping her get healthy, and back on her feet.

"It's helped a lot just calming myself down and trying to get myself together to do everything you have to do," she said.

People in the program are checked on once a day, and they receive meals from Meals on Wheels during their stay.

The program is funded by the Homeless Network of Yakima County.