

# Services for homeless people featured at Jackson Project Connect event

By [Tarryl O. Jackson | Jackson Citizen Patr...](#)

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Larry Moon, left, receives a haircut Friday. Moon, who has moved from being homeless to having his own place, was one of more than 300 people participating in this year's Jackson Project Connect on Friday at the Salvation Army in Jackson. The free one day event offered clothing, food, toiletries, massages and haircuts in addition to financial, legal, medical and spiritual counseling.

Hundreds of Jackson-area residents poured into the Salvation Army on Friday for a hot meal, information about affordable housing and medical services, and free clothes.

"There's just a lot of good people helping others," said Summit Township resident Susan Shaw. "People are smiling from ear to ear."

It was all part of Jackson Project Connect 2009, a collaboration among about 30 local organizations and businesses. The event was a one-stop array of services for people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. "People that are in this situation see that there are services available for them," said Shannon Ford, housing advocate for the [Community Action](#)

[Agency](#). "We're working to make things better."

Between 300 and 400 people were expected to attend the five-hour event, which featured access to employment resources, substance abuse counseling and housing services. The event drew about 100 people last year.

"It looks like people are really utilizing the resources," said Kitrina Sims, manager of the Jackson Interfaith Shelter and an event organizer. "I've heard a lot of thank yous."

Guests received free haircuts, massages, eyeglass repair, goodie bags with toiletries and winter apparel. The Jackson Transportation Authority provided free bus rides.

"I found a lot of information I can use," Vandercook Lake resident Katie Stoddard said.

"It gives people a chance to see what kind help is here, to get the things they need," said John Dropko, who is staying at the Interfaith Shelter. "It's like a big family, people helping one another."

There were 86,000 homeless people in Michigan last year, nearly 8,000 more than in 2007, according to projections by the Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness. More than half of the state's homeless population are families.

The south-central Michigan area — which includes Jackson and eight other counties — had 14,267 people who were homeless last year, or about 870 more than in 2007, according to the coalition.

"There's a lot of people that I've never seen before," Barb Donner, a volunteer at End Hunger in Jackson, said of the crowd. "The need seems to be getting bigger and bigger."