

# Cities, agencies unite to help homeless

By Janette Williams Staff Writer

WEST COVINA — A regional network of community- and faith-based organizations has been formed in a concerted effort to find and fill the gaps in homeless services provided by every city in the San Gabriel Valley.

After a two-year study prompted by Los Angeles County, the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments has taken the lead in bringing together churches and nonprofit organizations that already provide some form of homeless services throughout the San Gabriel Valley.

On Wednesday at West Covina City Hall, board members representing 14 participating groups met for the first time and became the governing body of the San Gabriel Valley Housing and Homeless Services Coordinating Council.

Council.

COG Executive Director Nicholas Conway said he hopes the network's set-up of four geographic "clusters" of cities, anchored by Pasadena in the west and Pomona in the east, will become a template for other areas of the county.

"Pasadena was the first one to try to identify what they were dealing with, and better match the services ... and they're the only one that's done physical counts," Conway said before Wednesday's meeting. "Hopefully the rest of the Valley will build a safety net like Pasadena. But we recognize this is transitional. There are so many different issues."

Conway said the many organiza-

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During the first board meeting of the San Gabriel Valley Housing and Homeless Services Coordinating Council, Larry Johnson, of Union Station Homeless Services, talks about his organization.

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tions providing services to the San Gabriel Valley's thousands of homeless were all "doing their own thing," from handing out sandwiches to providing temporary shelter.

His office approached more than 500 community- and faith-based groups, Conway said. And although not all have so far joined the coalition, he said, they all replied.

As the new coordinating council — with four board members per "cluster" — gets going, members will have to start a "membership drive" to increase participation, Conway said; so far 34 membership forms have been received.

The county has provided \$160,000 to fund the council's first year of operation, and the board's first action will be to hire an executive director, Conway said.

More than 70 applications have already been received for the position, which will pay around \$94,000 a year, he said.

Joe Colletti, whose nonprofit Urban Initiatives was a consultant on the project, said he was "very encouraged" to see the COG bring the Valley's cities and unincorporated areas together to tackle homeless issues.



Sarah Reingewirtz Staff Photographer

Nicholas Conway, executive director of the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments, introduces the San Gabriel Valley Housing and Homeless Services Coordinating Council's first board members Wednesday in West Covina City Hall's community room.

"That has been long overdue," Colletti said, adding that clustering adjoining cities bridges the "geographic barriers" formed by the freeway system.

Between them, Pasadena and Pomona have 60 percent of the Valley's homeless, Colletti said.

"The rest of the homeless population is in between the

extreme east and west," he said. "The whole idea is to get all the other areas and all the other cities involved in addressing homelessness regionally."

Tapping into faith-based organizations and churches is "smart," Colletti said, since there are "dozens of congregations" in cities that don't have specific homeless service agencies.

At Wednesday's meeting, Gilbert Saldade, pastor of Hosea Chapel Christian Church in Alhambra, volunteered and was elected as the council's first chairman; Andrew Levander, director of the David and Margaret Youth and Family Services in La Verne, was elected vice chairman.

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