

A night on the street wakes up O.C. students

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THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

TUSTIN – Jannet Zamora, 17, shivered from the cool night air as she spent the evening on the sidewalk outside the Orange County Rescue Mission homeless shelter.

Zamora and about 20 other students participated in the Rescue Mission's "Sleepless in Orange County" on Saturday night. The event was planned to raise awareness about the more than 20,000 homeless people living in Orange County, said Margaret Coleman of the O.C. Rescue Mission.

"So many think of homelessness as that person begging on the streets," Coleman said. "What we really want to do is take that image and give young people an experience that softens their heart and empowers them to make a difference in their own communities."

Zamora, who learned about the event through her church in Newport Beach, said the night showed her how the homeless actually live.

"It's sad," Zamora said. "Not everybody has the opportunity to live in luxury in Orange County."

"It feels vulnerable not to have a house anymore," said Jimmy Reinstein, 18, of Anaheim. "I think I'll come away with a different understanding of what it means to be homeless."

At 1 a.m., students heard testimony from 10 formerly homeless individuals who now live at the Rescue Mission.

Therese Clark, 47, told of coming to the shelter more than a year ago with her two kids.

"I wanted to do something better for myself and my children," Clark said.

At 29, Clark's mother died and she began drinking to cope with her grief, beginning a long spiral of losing everything to drugs and alcohol.

"Somebody introduced me to meth," Clark said. "I lost my job. I lost my place to live. I lost myself, really."



Students sleep on pieces of cardboard on a patch of grass during a "Sleepless in Orange County" event at the Orange County Rescue Mission in Tustin on Saturday, April 24, 2010.

CARLOS DELGADO, FOR THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Clark lives at the Rescue Mission with about 165 other residents, Coleman said. Residents typically stay at the shelter for two years as they cultivate the vocational and life skills to live on their own, Coleman said.

Coleman added that "Sleepless in Orange County" was a call to action for students to make a difference in their own community one person at a time.