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WEDNESDAY

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Los Angeles Times

Shelter to Turn Away Single Women

■ **Homeless: Union Rescue Mission says it must shift funding to care for mothers with children.**

By STEVE BERRY
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Sparking protests from the homeless and their advocates, the Union Rescue Mission in downtown Los Angeles' skid row is closing its emergency overnight shelter for single women to save money.

"It really rips us to do this," said Warren Curry, president of the mission. "It's dollars, just simple dollars. We're shifting to cover the most critical need today, and that is women with children."

The Union Rescue Mission, at 545 S. San Pedro St., provides overnight shelter to about 200 women with children and about 200 single men. It also provides food, clothing, health care, counseling and legal aid. Other sites operated by the mission offer longer-term programs for drug addicts and victims of domestic violence.

After April 2, the skid row facility will no longer accept single women. About 110 beds are now set aside for them.

The mission's staff, working with 16 shelters, most of which are downtown, will help the women find other places to live. The single women will still be able to get food, counseling and other health and social services at the mission.

Although mission revenue has risen 7% in recent years, the increasing number of women with children has pushed costs up about a \$1 million a year, Curry said.

Closing the beds for single women will save about \$320,000 a year.

Few dispute the need to help homeless mothers, but critics said the mission's decision will put displaced women on the streets and expose families to a bad neighborhood.

"How could they put women and children in one of the most dangerous places on skid row?" said Alice Callaghan, founder of Las Familias del Pueblo, a local child day-care center. "This morning, I saw small children, not more than 6 years old,

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CLARENCE WILLIAMS / Los Angeles Times

About a dozen homeless men, women and advocates protest Union Rescue Mission's decision to close shelter to single women Tuesday.

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walking from the shelter to school," she said, referring to 9th Street Elementary School, about a half-mile away.

Callaghan was among about a dozen homeless men, women and advocates protesting on San Julian Street, outside the Union Rescue Mission. Four of the protesters held a large banner saying: "Single Women Need Shelter Too. Skid Row No Place for Kids."

Although hundreds of women with children live in low-rent hotels scattered throughout skid row, advocates say they are living there only as a last resort.

"Nobody in their right mind would want to live here with their children," said Paula Smith, 26, who is spending nights at the mis-

sion with her four children, ages 8 months, 3, 5 and 6.

But she, like many of the other mothers sitting in the day room of the mission, said she has no choice. "There's so much drugs out there, and you have a lot of sick people," she said.

Another woman, who would not identify herself, said every time she goes outside, men harass her 17-year-old daughter. "But I'll have to stay here as long as it takes to find another place." She said she was evicted from her apartment after her sister got into a fight with her landlord.

Pamela McKee, 38, a single mother, has her own troubles. She said she probably will have to return to the streets, because finding space in another shelter will be dif-

ficult.

Skid row, she said, scares her.

Union Rescue Mission officials say they will do all they can to help McKee and the others find new temporary quarters.

"We are not going to just abandon them," Curry said.

He and communications director Liz Mooradian said single men and women have more flexibility in finding shelter than women with children do.

The number of homeless families appearing at the mission's doorstep has been increasing since 1994, Mooradian said, and the cost of housing one woman with a child is about four times the cost of housing a single man. She said women are referred to the mission by other organizations, including law en-

forcement agencies.

Los Angeles County has 48 programs for families, said Ruth Schwartz, head of Shelter Partnership Inc. Those programs provide 2,282 beds, which is about 17% of all short-term housing beds. Nevertheless, she said, that is not enough to serve homeless mothers.

The mission also has reduced the number of beds for single men to about 200 from 300, because fewer men are willing to abide by some recently adopted overnight rules.

The nonprofit, Christian-oriented mission, opened in 1891, and is the oldest rescue agency in Los Angeles. With a 225,000-square-foot building, a \$16-million annual budget and a staff of about 100, it is the largest mission of its kind in the country.